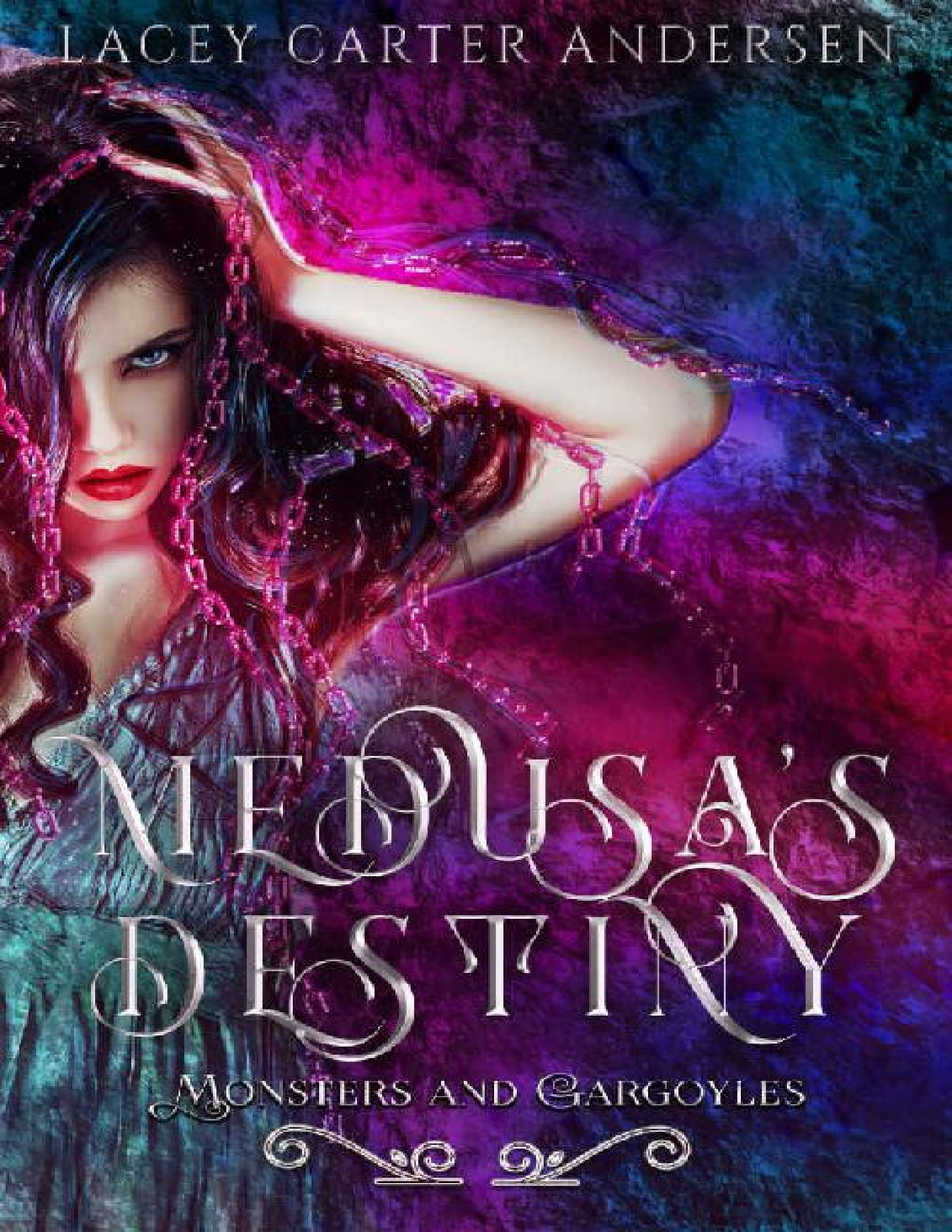


LACEY CARTER ANDERSEN



MEDUSA'S DESTINY

MONSTERS AND GARGOYLES



Medusa's Destiny

Lacey Carter Andersen

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*To my husband—thanks for letting me talk about writing and covers all
day.*

You're a saint!



~ Lacey Carter Andersen



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Author's Note

The first part of this note is written to all of you research buffs out there. Read this before you start the story! I spent countless hours researching Greek mythology, along with many other cultures' myths and beliefs. This story does **not** accurately reflect all my research. I took liberties with this series. I picked through and chose which myths I liked and ignored ones that I didn't. I have nods to other cultures, and even created some twists of my own. I did all of these things for reasons. This is fiction after all! So take a deep breath, and accept it before you start, or this series might just drive you crazy.

For all my other readers, this is the first book in a series of stand-alone reverse harem romances. There will be a lot of heat and a lot of humor. I really hope you enjoy it!



Chapter One

M^{edusa}

I take another long swig of the bottle of booze in my hand. A nicely dressed couple walk past, shooting me a dirty look. I grin and take another drink. For a second I think I look freaking cool, and then I hit the trash can. Tumbling over it, I hit the ground on my back. The air rushes out of me, but I lift the bottle, satisfied to see I haven't spilled a drop.

I grin again and lift my other arm. Some old taco wrapper is sticking to my new leather jacket. *Great, just great.*

"Fuck," I mutter as I struggle to my feet.

This day just keeps getting better and better. First, I lose my job. Then, my best friend says I'm too much of a screw-up to keep in her life. And now? Now, I have old beans—and what I hope to god isn't meat—on my new jacket.

I just need to crawl in bed and let this crappy day pass me by.

As I stumble past an alley, I catch a flash of silver. When I pause, my superior vision picks out a woman pressed against the wall. Her breathing is rapid and her pupils dilated. Three men surround her.

I want to walk past. Damn everything to hell, I want to just ignore her.

Nobody appreciates my help anyway.

Closing my eyes, I tell myself this isn't my problem, but it doesn't matter. I'm already heading down the alley when I open my eyes.

"Hey!" I shout. "You guys just get out of here. I've got shit to do."

Everyone turns to me at once, but the greasy-haired guy holding the knife is the first to speak. "Nice sunglasses, cool girl. What? Too bright for you in this beautiful shit-hole?"

I smirk. "Trust me, asshole, you don't want me taking these glasses off."

I glance at the frightened woman to see that she's not exactly a woman. She's probably fifteen, but from her dark makeup and barely-there clothes, she wanted to look older.

“Now, this girl and I are going to take off, and you, fellas, can just go on with your night. Okay?”

This time, it's Greasy's good-looking friend who responds. “We're just having fun. Why don't you join us?”

He starts to move toward me with a big smile on his face. He probably thinks that smile is going to get me going, but I know his type. A pretty face often hides the most dangerous people, and this guy's dangerous. He's not as dangerous as me though. *Fucker.*

I take another sip of my drink. “I think I'll pass.”

“Sorry,” he says, his eyes narrowing. “I didn't really mean that to be a question.”

My hand tightens on my bottle. This was seriously the last thing I wanted to deal with tonight, but if these guys needed me to beat the shit out of them, well, I guess I'll have to do it.

I set my drink down on the edge of a dumpster. “Come here, then. Let's get this over with.”

There's the slightest flicker of doubt in his eyes, but he masks it as he slides up to me. He tries to grab my shoulder, but I move with lightning-fast reflexes, twisting his wrist and bringing him to his knees. A surprised squeak leaves his lips, and I enjoy the look of fear on his face before I snap his wrist. When he screams, I drive my knee into his nose, and a second later he's sprawled on the ground, out cold.

My gaze moves to his buddies. “Who's next?”

Greasy boy's knife moves from the girl to point at me. “What the hell are you? How the hell did you do that?”

I smile and head towards him at a lazy stroll. “That? Oh, that was nothing. What I'm going to do to you is going to make that look like child's play.”

He slashes the knife out in front of him, his filthy face streaked with sweat.

I can't help but look at the girl. I can tell she wants to run, but I hope she isn't stupid enough to do it before I get the knife from Greasy.

When I get close enough, he stabs out at me.

I knock the weapon out of his grasp, and it hits the ground with a clatter. The sound radiates through the alley.

A second later, his quiet friend pulls a gun from his pocket, levels it at me, and pulls the trigger.

Bullets are fast, but unfortunately for these dipshits, I'm faster. I yank his friend in front of me, and the bullet hits him in the back.

Neither man has time to react before I send Greasy flying towards his friend. Another bullet goes off, and they both hit the ground, with Greasy on top of him. A pathetic moan comes from one of them, but I'm not sure which one. I stride toward them, find the hand that's still clutching the gun, and crush the man's bones beneath my foot, along with the metal of the barrel.

He screams as I whirl toward the woman. She's trembling against the wall.

I want to say something, but what am I going to say? Don't spend your weekends with thugs? Go home to your mom and dad and be a good girl? *Why bother?* If what just happened doesn't frighten her enough, nothing I say is going to help.

So, I walk past her and pick up my drink. Taking another chug, I feel another wave of relaxation hit me. God I love tequila.

"Hey!"

I spin around.

The quiet thug hits me in the face, sending my glasses flying. I don't have time to warn him. To close my eyes. To do anything. Within seconds, he turns to stone, his face forever frozen in horror.

Closing my eyes, I kneel down and reach around until I find my special glasses. Slipping them back on, I look around the alley. The girl takes one look at me and turns and races away.

Slowly I stand. "You're welcome!"

I turn and start back toward my empty apartment, feeling strangely low. If I actually expected her to appreciate what I did, or thank me, then it isn't her fault. It's mine for being completely delusional.

Over two thousand years old, and I haven't accepted my place in the world. It's pathetic.

Because—news flash—no one ever appreciates it when I help them. Yeah, everyone likes heroes. But scary monsters? Not so much. And that's exactly what I am. A monster. Medusa. A woman who can turn anyone to stone with just a glance.

Is it any wonder I'm such a screw up?



Chapter Two

M*edusa*

Music blares. I scream, fall off my bed with a thump, and lay there staring at the ceiling. Did I really forget to turn off my damn alarm? Groaning, I grab my pounding head and barely make it to my feet. Yanking my alarm, I turn and smash it against the wall.

At last, the damn music has stopped.

I fall back into bed, and my eyes instantly close. Sleep tugs at me once more, even though I can now feel the bright sunlight prying at the back of my eyelids.

And then my phone starts ringing.

My eyes flash open. Grabbing it off my nightstand, I flip open my phone. "Someone better be dead—"

"Actually, that's exactly why I'm calling."

I freeze at the familiar voice. "What do you want?"

"What do you think I want, Melissa?"

I stiffen, trying to ignore my hammering heart. "Not a clue."

"So," he stretches out the word. "You have no idea why there are two dead men and a man who appears to have been turned into stone in an alley two blocks from your house?"

"Not a clue."

He swears. "This can't keep happening. Do you understand me? The Special Unit can only sweep so much of this crap under the carpet before humans start asking questions. Before you attract the attention of the wrong people."

"Yeah, yeah, okay."

"No, don't give me that. This is serious."

I put my hand over my face, my entire head throbbing. "Look, Peter, you dumped me, so don't start pretending you care about me now."

He's quiet for a long minute. "You're *Medusa*. I do care about you, just not enough to die for you."

I hate how much his words hurt. "Got it."

“Listen—“

“I’ve heard it all before. I’ll watch myself, okay? Now, let me sleep off this hangover.”

“Have you really been drinking again? I’m starting to worry about you.”

“Again,” I say, my voice crisp. “I’m not your problem anymore. Thanks for the heads up.”

“Melissa...”

“Be safe out there, officer.” I click my phone, ending the call.

I hold my phone for too long, rolling onto my side. I don't know how much longer I can take this feeling of nothingness. I don't know what's worse, the aching loneliness that doesn't seem to go away, or the feeling that nothing is ever going to get better. Peter worked so damn hard to make me fall in love with him, but the second he learned the truth, he was gone, just like everyone else.

The thing was... I wasn't just tired of hurting, of getting my heart broken. I was tired of everything.

Living forever sounds so fun in vampire romances, but that's when you have a bunch of hot guys fighting over you. Living forever as Medusa, a woman who turns people to stone with a glance, well, it's not all that fun.

I close my eyes, wanting to fall back to sleep. I love to sleep, because most of the time, my dreams are a hell of a lot better than real life. But unfortunately, now that I'm up, I can't.

Cursing my stupid life, I sit up and head for the shower.

I throw my clothes onto the floor and turn on the water. Stepping beneath the spray, I hiss, remembering that I still don't have hot water... yet another freaking bill I haven't paid. Teeth chattering, I scrub my hair and body as fast as possible, then shut off the water and get the hell out of there.

With a towel wrapped around my chest, I brush my hair and step out of the bathroom.

Suddenly, someone knocks at my door.

I ignore them, searching through my piles of clothes for ones that smell the least. But the damn knocking continues.

Cursing, I pull my glasses off the dresser, put them on, and head for the damn knocking. Throwing back the locks, I yank open the door.

A massive man is waiting on the other side. And when I say massive, I mean linebacker massive. He fills my entire doorway. Now, I'm barely five-foot tall, so I'm used to everyone looking tall, but this guy, he's tall for *tall* people. My gaze moves up from his narrow waist up to his broad shoulders and muscular arms, and then up to his face.

I suddenly find it hard to breathe. He's handsome, with blue eyes so light they're almost grey, and short blond hair. *He has the face of an angel.* Because he doesn't just look strangely beautiful, he also looks... kind.

His gaze runs over my towel-clad form until at last, he stops at my face. A blush darkens his cheeks.

"Melissa Gorgon?"

I lean against the doorframe. "That's me."

"You're not what I expected," he says, staring at me as if I'm the first woman he's ever seen in his life.

Even though my damn head still hurts, I smile. There's nothing wrong with flirting with a handsome man. Blond gods don't drop from the sky every damn day, after all.

"Oh really? Well, want me to drop the towel and see if that's what you expected too?"

His blush deepens.

Maybe my life just got a little less crappy.

He leans closer. "Sorry."

I frown. "Sorry?"

Something hits me from behind, and my world goes black.



Chapter Three

M^{edusa}

Blinking awake, I try to move, only to discover I've been bound. My head snaps up as I'm instantly alert. I'm wearing a massive white shirt, I'm in a strange living room, and I'm tied to a chair. My hands are in front of me, in shackles, but ropes wrap around me, keeping me upright in the chair.

Mistake, assholes.

I flex, fully expecting to break whatever the hell has me tied down, but it doesn't budge. I try again, feeling the metal cut against my wrists, but nothing happens.

My heart starts pounding, filling my ears. How is this possible?

"She's awake!" My head jerks to the man in the doorway. He's the blond from my door.

"You're going to pay for this," I snarl at him.

He has the good grace to look guilty.

Another man squeezes past him. This one is just as big, but a little taller. He has breathtaking hazel eyes, messy brown hair, and a slight beard.

Every muscle in my body tenses as he walks toward me. "So, do you usually have to tie up women to get them to your place?"

His eyes narrow. "Are you Medusa?"

I smirk. "It's pronounced Melissa."

"Cut the bullshit," he growls. "Are you her? The woman of legend?"

I shrug the best I can while bound to a chair. "Most legends are bullshit made up by people with tiny brains and too much time on their hands."

He comes to stand just above me. "Are you her?"

I give him a look I know is arrogant-as-hell. "I'm Melissa. A woman you and your buddy apparently kidnapped, so I think you're the ones with some explaining to do."

He leans down and puts one hand on the chair's arm. With his other hand, he reaches out and grabs the side of my glasses.

My pulse races. "Don't do that."

"Why not?" he challenges.

"*Don't!*"

"Why?" he starts to tug them down.

I squeeze my eyes shut and fight against my bindings.

He pulls the glasses off. "Open your eyes."

"No!" I struggle harder, my heart pounding.

I don't want to kill anyone. As much as everyone thinks I'm a monster, I hate it. I *hate* it down to my very soul. Killing assholes in alleys haunts me in quiet moments, but I can't imagine killing these two. For some reason, the idea makes me feel hollow inside. Gutted.

"Open your damn eyes!" He commands.

Frantic words bubble out. "I am Medusa. Please, put on my glasses. If I look at you, you're dead, do you understand me? Put my glasses back on!"

I expect him to obey me right away. Instead, everything grows quiet.

After a moment, I hear the blond speak from near the doorway. "I don't know many monsters who work that hard not to kill two people who kidnapped her..." His words are quiet, almost angry.

"What kind of game are you playing?" The man above me growls, leaning so close I can feel his breath on my face. "We both know what you are, so open your eyes and prove it."

I shake my head. For some reason, I can feel a panic attack coming. I *cannot* have a panic attack in front of these two men.

His hand is suddenly resting on my knee. "Open your eyes."

I freeze. "No."

His hand starts to move up my inner-thigh.

"What the fuck are you doing?" The blond says from across the room.

The dark-haired man keeps moving higher, and I'm suddenly horribly aware of the fact that I'm not wearing anything at all beneath this giant shirt that flops everywhere.

And then, he's ripped away. I hear something crash to the ground, but I still don't open my eyes.

"What the fuck!" the dark-haired man yells. "Harold, I was just trying to get her to show who she is."

My glasses are suddenly clumsily placed back on my face.

I look up into the face of the blond guy, who's apparently named Harold. "Thanks."

He looks... like he wants blood. I would have never thought the sweet, blushing guy who stood at my door could look so frightening, but he does. I guess I'm not a good judge of character, because I didn't think he'd be in on a kidnapping either.

"I'm sorry for Byron's behavior," Harold says.

I turn to look at the dark-haired man. He's getting up from the floor, where a table and lamp have been knocked over. Blood runs from his nose, and he looks pissed.

"She wouldn't open her eyes!"

Harold spins to face the other man. "So you made her think we intended to violate her?" He crosses his arms in front of his broad chest. "We were sent here to get a monster, not become one."

His words seem to vibrate through the room.

At last, Byron wipes at the blood on his nose, and the energy in the room changes slightly. "Next time you handle it."

The blond giant nods. "I will." Then, he turns to me. "So, you're Medusa?"

I nod, feeling wary.

He holds my gaze with his intense one, and for a minute I'm lost in the depths of his eyes. I feel lame, because a stupid thought floats into my head. *I've never seen that color blue before.*

The giant kneels down in front of me. "Well, Medusa, we need you to come with us."

"No way in hell." The words come out before my brain can process them.

Diarrhea of the mouth is a special gift I have.

He winces. "We... uh... need you to."

"Thanks for the offer," I say, "but I think I'll pass."

Byron snorts behind the other man. "You're really handling this better than I did."

Harold shoots him a nasty look before he turns back to me. "The thing is, we need your help. And actually, you're the only one who can help us."

They need help from a monster? No one needs that.

"Why?" I ask, suddenly intrigued.

He takes a deep breath. "I can't tell you."

“Okay... well, then for how long?”

He gives a pained look. “We’re not sure.”

“Helpful.” I sigh. “And where do you plan to take me?”

He shifts awkwardly. “Uh, we can’t tell you that either.”

I stare at him until he blushes again. “You make a compelling case, but I think I’m going to have to give an absolute no on this.”

The dark-haired man comes up and puts a hand on the other man’s shoulder, then draws him back. Suddenly, I’m face-to-face with this Byron.

My lips curl. “I hope you enjoyed feeling me up, because if you ever touch me again, I’ll cut off your hands.”

His eyes narrow, and he leans closer. “Two things, monster. First, I know what you are. You might have gained some sympathy with my friend because of that whole *I won’t open my eyes* crap, but I know what you are. And two, I don’t want to touch you. Just the sight of you makes me sick. So, no need to worry about that.”

A thousand moments flash through my mind of times when people called me a monster. Days when people told me I made them sick, when men broke my heart when they found out my identity.

I act without thinking and smash his nose with my forehead.

He cries out and falls back. His hand touches his nose, his eyes widened in shock. It starts to bleed again.

“You—“

The other man cuts him off. “Medusa, we’re sorry. We wanted you to come with us by choice, but time is of the essence, and the fate of an entire people rests on getting you to our destination.”

“So,” I swallow the bitterness in the back of my throat. “You’re taking me against my will.”

He nods, looking apologetic while he helps his friend to his feet.

The dark-haired man glares at me as he holds his nose, then goes to the window and throws it open wide.

“What, are we going out the window?” I ask sarcastically.

Byron smirks at me. “Actually, that’s exactly what we’re doing.”

A sinking feeling grows in my belly. For some reason, it’s like reality is finally starting to settle in. Somewhere in the back of my mind, I’d been sure this situation was temporary, that these two couldn’t possibly hurt me. I’m an immortal monster, for God’s sake.

But... something feels off, and I have a feeling escaping from them might not be quite as easy as I thought.



Chapter Four

B*yron*

I am so angry. With myself, with Harold, and with the woman. I wasn't going to hurt her. I wasn't going to touch her. I just needed to know that she was as evil as the Elites said. Without being sure, how the hell was I going to carry out this mission?

How was I supposed to know she wouldn't open her eyes? Wasn't that her thing?

Pulling the tissues out of my nose, I stare at my reflection without seeing myself. All I can see is the woman. She's nothing like I expected. She's tiny, so tiny that I could hold her for days without tiring myself out.

And... she's unexpectedly beautiful. She doesn't have a head full of snakes, like I had expected. Instead, her hair is long and dark, full of waves, and she has the face of a goddess, not a monster.

An image of her naked form flashes into my mind, the last thing I should be picturing. I think of the moment when I dressed her in my white shirt. I'd told myself that it'd be easy for me not to look. That this was a creature that we were bound to fight against, to count as an enemy.

But... I don't know what the fuck is wrong with me. I tried not to look, but I'm a man, and she is stunning. All of her: her breasts, her smooth stomach, and her bare pussy.

I groan. I hate myself. It was only a second that I saw her before I yanked the shirt on and started buttoning, but it was enough.

She's attractive. *I* find her attractive. The enemy.

I am so fucked up.

Harold raps on the door. "We need to go."

I take a deep breath and glance down to see that my hard erection is visible through my jeans. Damn it! I untuck my shirt to hide the evidence, but I don't do a very good job.

Keep it together!

Opening the door, I stare at my best friend.

He runs a hand through his hair, which usually means he has something to say that I won't like.

"What is it?"

"Forrest called. He needs my help."

I stare at him. "You're kidding me."

He shakes his head. "You'll have to take her to Eros."

I cannot be alone with this woman. "Can't we just get Forrest together and then—"

"What, scared to be alone with me?" the woman says, looking toward me and pouting her lips.

My traitorous cock gives another twitch.

"Shut up!" I tell her. *How can she see through me so easily?*

Harold gives me a disapproving look. "You know the time constraints we're under. And I would take her, but you're the better fighter, if something goes wrong."

I want to pound my fist through the wall until I don't care about any of it, but instead I spout out, "Fine."

He nods. "Let's get her untied."

Harold is careful how he removes her from the chair, careful that she can't escape. He leaves the chains on her wrists, but even with that, she runs for the door. I catch her easily.

She tries to fight against me, but all it does is increase my arousal to have the tiny woman thrashing against me while I pin her to my body.

"Stop it!" I finally command.

She stops, turns around, and spits on me.

I wipe her saliva off my cheek and push back the rage building inside me. "Do that again, and next time I won't be so gentle."

Harold gives me *another* disapproving look before he moves to the window.

A second later, he transforms. His skin turns the stunning color of wet stone as grey wings sprout from his back.

He turns to look at us before he leaves, motioning toward her with his head. "We'll meet at the location as soon as we're done."

Moving gracefully, he turns back to the window and jumps out, leaving me alone with our prisoner.

She turns to me, her mouth hanging open. "You're gargoyles."

I smirk. "Observant, aren't you."

Her nose scrunches up in a way I refuse to find adorable. "But gargoyles don't exist."

"Says *Medusa*."

She stiffens in my arms. "No, I mean, I thought you monster-hunters had died out long ago."

"Sorry, sweetheart, but we're alive and thriving." The lie comes easily. She doesn't need to know how our numbers have dwindled.

She's quiet for a long minute. "Are the rumors about gargoyles true then? Do you kill my kind to protect humanity?"

I can't answer her, so I don't. "Come on, I need your help with a friend of yours. Remember Eros?"

"Eros!" she says with a sneer. "He's no friend of mine!"

Ignoring her lies, I drag my prisoner to the window. "Yeah right, I'm sure your kind throw parties together or whatever."

She strains against the metal chains binding her wrists in front of her. "Eros was a god, if you'll recall. Not one of my kind, and now he's some kind of fucking siren of lust, luring unsuspecting humans to him. That is so not my thing."

My gaze moves to her delicious, pale legs. If she leaned forward in my shirt, I'd get a full view of her round ass cheeks. Like hell she doesn't lure men to her. This woman is a damned siren if I ever saw one.

When we reach the window, I shift into my stone-form. It only takes a moment for my skin to turn the same color as Harold's and for wings to sprout from my back. I stretch my wings wide, nearly groaning in relief at taking my true form.

"Come on, now," I tell her, in a gruff voice. "The sooner you help me, the sooner we can be done with each other."

"Fine," she says, spinning around, reaching her short arms out towards me. I'm mesmerized as I lean down and she puts her arms behind my neck.

When I stand up, she's forced to wrap her legs around my waist to keep from dangling from her chains. And then, I realize how completely screwed I am. This position... it's criminal.

You've got to be fucking kidding me. There is no way in hell I'm flying with this woman like this. No fucking way.

She shifts, and my erection gives a painful twinge. *Fuck. Maybe I should take on my battle form?* Battle form is when we're fully stone. It's not something we use often, because it makes us slower and more

awkward. I'll never make it where I need to go in battle form, but then, I also won't be human enough to *feel* her and be turned on.

"Are we going?" she asks, in a voice that's too damned innocent.

What am I supposed to say? That I'm too turned on by her to fly like this?

I picture her on my back, her wide open naked pussy rubbing against my back. *That's not going to work either.*

"Didn't you say you were in a rush?" she asks.

I growl at her, then decide the hell with it and jump out the window. I'm satisfied as fuck when she screams. I guess the little hell-cat's afraid of something after all.

But then her legs tighten around my waist, and she's suddenly riding my cock. My oversized shirt is pushed up around her thighs and I know she's bare and open to me.

I'm so turned on I almost forget to flap my damn wings, but I do... right in time, and I take us up over the tops of the buildings. She keeps screaming, but I'm not worried about people seeing us. My glamour keeps us hidden from human eyes.

I'm not worried about the humans, but what am I worried about?

This delicious creature is squeezing her legs around me and rubbing herself so hard against me that it's only a matter of time before I come in my pants. I'm no inexperienced teenager, but I took a vow of celibacy. Which means it's been a long-ass time since I last buried myself balls deep into a woman.

I can change my damn pants, but I don't want this woman to know the truth. It's a matter of pride. Of keeping the upper-hand over my prisoner. As she breathes heavily into my ear, I hear her whimper my name.

My traitorous cock twitches again, hardening to the point where I don't even know if I'm flying in the right fucking direction, because I'm losing my mind. She wiggles against me, and my dirty mind starts to think of what she must look like spread wide right now. I'm sure she's tight and maybe wet. They say the line between fear and arousal is paper-thin, and I'm starting to wonder how true that is.

She whimpers my name again, and my hands shift.

Suddenly, they aren't on my shirt. My damn hands are on her ass. My shirt is too big for her, it moves in the wind above my hands.

I hate that I slide them around the curve of her generous ass. I hate that I hold her closer to my dick. When she gives a little bounce, I start to wonder if she's doing it on purpose, but there's no way. This woman is terrified. She hates me, and I'm sure as hell sure she doesn't find me attractive.

When she bounces again, my hands start to move her, bouncing her up and down on my cock. Her mouth presses against my neck, and I explode inside my jeans.

I'm shaking by the time my senses come back. Thank heavens that we're flying safely in the clouds. I was so lost to my desire we could've been flying straight into a plane for all I knew.

And now, for the first time in longer than I can remember, I feel oddly relaxed. Every nerve in my body is humming in satisfaction, and my muscles feel like liquid.

For a long minute, I fly quietly, hoping to God that this woman didn't notice what just happened. I hope she has no idea I'm so pathetic that I just came in my pants from having her spread body wrapped around mine.

She leans up and bites my ear. "Was that good for you?"

Damn it!

A string of curses explodes from my lips. "That was nothing!"

She pulls back, and I can just barely see her eyes through her sunglasses. Her eyelids are hooded in the sexiest damn way possible.

"You know, when your dick is the size of a bat, it's pretty damn hard to hide that you're aroused."

I glare at her. "Turbulence always does that to me."

She chews her bottom lip and my cock hardens again.

This is going to be a damned long flight.



Chapter Five

M^{edusa}

Fucking Fates and their fucking sick senses of humor!

I smirk at the thought, because the Fates have *got* to have their bored hands in this mess. Who else could've created this insane scenario?

I'm Medusa. A powerful being capable of turning almost anyone and anything to stone... but not gargoyles. The bastards are immune to me.

And gargoyles? They're supposed to be gone. Vanished from this modern world.

So, all I can think is those three beastly ladies decided to have a good laugh and brought these assholes to my door. The perfect kidnappers for this monster. *And, of course, they're hot as fuck. And I'm insanely horny.*

None of this is cool. Not cool at all.

The next time I see them, I'm going to give those Fates a piece of my mind. But until then, I just need to figure out what the hell is going on. And what this gargoyle has in store for me.

We've been flying through an entire day and night. Byron doesn't seem to mind, but I'm hungry, thirsty, and tired of pressing against his hard erection. It would be so damned easy to use him to get myself off. I'm so damned ready to have his big length inside of me that I'm leaking, and I feel so fucking swollen, it's ridiculous.

But I won't give him the satisfaction of knowing he's turning me on too.

Because I swear this guy has come three times since we started flying. Maybe I'm wrong. Maybe, like he said, it's just the turbulence, but his pants are wet, and it's not just from me.

His hands on my ass are so close to my heated core that it's driving me crazy, but sometimes he starts to move me against him, press me against him, and I feel the muscles in his body tense. The third time I watched his face, and he looked like a man coming. An angry man, but a man all the same.

Suddenly, we start to fly lower.

“Are we landing?” I ask.

He ignores me, which he has done for the last day.

It irks me.

As the wind starts to slam against us harder and harder, I begin to bounce against his dick again. His hands tighten on my ass, and I hope I’m making him frustrated, because my treacherous body is heating up again.

When we land beneath an apple tree, he doesn’t release me for a long minute.

I look up at him, and he has the most tortured expression I’ve ever seen on a man. His eyes are dark, aroused. When his gaze moves to my lips, my breathing increases, and I feel my nipples harden against his chest. He’s going to kiss me. I know it. He’ll kiss me, and then we’ll fuck like wild animals on this hilltop.

I can’t believe it when he pulls my cuffed arms from around his neck and puts my legs down. My legs give out and I sink to the ground, unable to get my balance with my hands cuffed. The jackass doesn’t bother to help me up. He just takes several steps back.

“That,” he points to an apple tree, “is breakfast, lunch, and dinner, so eat up. And that,” he points to a river nearby, “is your water for the day. And if you need to use the bathroom, find a bush. We take off again in twenty.”

Without another word, he spins and stomps off. I glare at his retreating back. If I had any idea where we are, I would have made a break for it. Instead, I sigh and find a tall bush where I can use the bathroom. Afterwards, I wash my hands and stumble back to the tree, tired but not too tired to eat.

It takes some doing with my hands cuffed, but I pick a handful of apples. My hunger had started to fade, but as soon as I take a bite, it rushes back, hard and fast. The apples won’t be enough—I need protein, dammit—but I eat as much as I can anyway. Enough to sate my hunger. *For now.*

Immediate needs taken care of, I start to relax, but I find myself aching for a nice bath, to clean off a day of sweat and filth from my skin. And, as much as I hate it, to ease my arousal in the cool waters.

I glance around myself, but the gargoyle Byron is nowhere to be found. The way Byron acts, I doubt he would come looking for me by the river’s edge without announcing himself. I walk along the edge of the river until I

find a little inlet. I unbutton my shirt, but then stop short when I realize I can't take it fully off with my cuffs. *Dammit!*

I sit on the edge of the river and sink in as far as I can without getting the shirt wet. Once I brace myself, I start to wash. First, I splash my face, and I brush water through my hair to pull it back from my face. Finally, I slide my hands down my breasts, where my nipples are hardened into nubs, and down my stomach until I reach my hot core.

It couldn't hurt anything...

Looking around again, I listen closely until I'm sure I'm alone. When I don't hear anything, I slip my hand into my folds. I know it won't take long. My frustrations have built up to a ridiculous point. All I need is a couple strokes, and I'll be there.

Closing my eyes, I slide my fingers along my sensitive nerves, eager for my release. I move faster and faster, gasping for breath. I'm so close. So damn close.

Water sprinkles on my face.

My eyes fly open, and I'm staring face-to-face with a male water nymph. He's damned handsome, with eyes the color of the river, and dark blue hair. I already know he's a nymph of lust, because his gaze is fixed on where my fingers are buried inside myself.

Nymphs of lust are harmless, so I raise a brow. "Did you come to watch?"

His full lips curve into a smile. "I was watching. I came to join in."

I think of Byron and feel strangely guilty. "Sorry, big boy, but you'll have to be satisfied with watching."

His gaze moves over my body. He's hovering right over me, braced so he's not touching me, but I can tell what he's thinking. It'd take nothing at all for him to lie down on top of me and slip right inside.

Unfortunately for him, I won't allow it.

"Why are your hands bound?"

I stare at my chained hands and shrug. "I'm a prisoner."

He leans closer to me, so that his mouth is hovering just over mine. "Would you like to be my prisoner?"

Suddenly, he's yanked off of me.

I look up and see Byron, his face wild. He slams a fist into the face of nymph, and then punches him again, and again. The nymph is slim and half the size of Byron. If he keeps this up, he'll do some serious damage.

I scramble out of the water and grab the big gargoyle's arm. "Stop it right now!"

His eyes are still wild. His gaze moves over my bare body, and I blush, grabbing the sides of my shirt to close it; hiding myself from view.

To my surprise, that pisses him off more. He punches the nymph again, then grabs me and throws me over his shoulder.

I bang my chained fists against his back. "I'm wet! And practically naked!"

"You didn't mind him seeing you!" he roars.

I'm so shocked by his response I don't even know what to say.

He doesn't put me down until he reaches the apple tree and then he slams me against the trunk. I gape at him, completely unsure what he's planning.

His gaze moves to the shirt hanging open on my frame. He reaches out, and everything within me awakens, waiting for his touch.

It never happens. He buttons the shirt, one button at a time, starting at the top. His fingers slide against my skin as he does so. When he gets to the last button, his hand brushes my core, and damn it, I'm ready to have him inside of me.

Instead, he leans down and pulls my arms back around his neck.

My legs wrap around his waist, and he moves out from beneath the branches of the tree. I have no idea why he's so angry, but he says nothing for a long time.

Regardless of what he says—or doesn't say—his hard erection presses against me for the entirety of our trip.



Chapter Six

Harold “Explain this to me again,” Forrest says, really slowly like he thinks I’m an idiot.

He’s the one who was taken prisoner by sirens, so who’s the real idiot?

“We found Medusa, but she’s... beautiful.”

He drops the half-eaten stick of meat he’s roasting over the fire. “How beautiful is beautiful?”

I don’t want to talk about her anymore, because she’s been haunting me since I first saw her. But then again, I kind of want Forrest to be as miserable and horny as I am.

“She’s small—like I can’t even imagine our cocks fitting into her tight pussy—small. She’s got these big breasts for a girl her size, and since she was wearing just a white shirt, I could see her little pink nipples through the fabric. And God, they were the kind of nipples every man just wants to suck. You know, put her on your lap and just suck for hours. Those kind of nipples. And she’s got this whole body just made to be licked and nibbled on.”

Forrest groans. “Have I told you how much I hate being celibate?”

I grin. “All the damn time.”

Forrest pets his erection. “If you’ll excuse me, I need a moment.”

He rises, and I roll my eyes, only I’m fucking aroused too.

I swear to God we’re pathetic. We hated becoming celibate. We hate living in a place where there are only three females anywhere close to our age. It was some kind of cruel joke that we were sent to find a monster and instead kidnapped the kind of woman we’ve been dreaming about sharing for years.

Despite myself, I pull out my cock and start to stroke it. I think about how delicious her pussy must feel. In perfect clarity, I imagined myself sinking deeply into her and pounding in and out until she crashes over the edge, screaming my name.

I come with a strangled sound, letting my seed decorate the floor of the woods. When I'm done, I pull up my pants, go to the river and wash my hands. When I get back, Forrest is already waiting for me.

"You're shameless," he teases me.

I laugh. "Like you're any better."

We sit in silence for a long time. Above us, the sky is decorated with stars. And the sounds of the crackling fire weaves perfectly with the sounds of crickets and owls. This is the life—freedom, with no one breathing down our necks or watching our every move.

"So," Forrest says, breaking the silence. "How are we going to kill this hot woman?"

I stiffen. Suddenly, the shadows in the woods seem deeper, darker, and I don't feel peaceful anymore.

"I don't know."

We both lie down in the grass, staring up at the stars, and I know we're both thinking the same thing. Killing monsters we can do, but killing a woman? I don't think we can do it.

The thing is, we won't have a choice.



Chapter Seven

M^{edusa}

I stare down at a city tucked away in the center of a tangled jungle. It's a strange mix of ancient buildings and modern wonders. Roads have been cut through the jungle to connect this place with the outside world, and from this high up, they look like black snakes weaving through greenery.

I know this place. *Although it's changed. A lot.* My mind goes back to hundreds of years ago when this was nothing more than a little village.

The people were kind... until they found out what I was.

My stomach twists. Somehow, even after so long, I can still remember some of the villagers' faces. *It's strange that they've all been dead and gone for a long time.*

That was another thing about living forever; you try to accept all the changes, but sometimes it kind of feels like a punch to the gut. Everything keeps changing, but you just stay the same.

But I guess nothing has been normal since I met these damned gargoyles. Which is... kind of nice.

I look up at Byron's face. He looks focused on the sky ahead of us, but I sense he's aware of my stare.

Who would have thought my enemies would be so damned hot?

Gargoyles used to be everywhere, in my younger days. Humans carved them, and their desperation brought the creatures to life. Monsters everywhere feared them. I even feared them, even though I'd never actually seen one. I remembered a time when just seeing a shadow overhead made my heart race.

But it had to have been more than two or three hundred years since I stopped looking for them in the sky, since I stopped worrying about them discovering me. Gargoyles just didn't feel like terrifying enemies anymore, more like nightmares from my childhood.

The presence of them should frighten me. They kill my kind. In fact, if I'm honest, I suspect that these intend to kill me. And I already know my

powers don't work against them, even if I were inclined to try, which I'm not.

So why am I not afraid of them?

I want to believe it's because I know I have nothing to fear from them, but a small part of me worries it's because being around them makes me feel alive again, excited for life. I hate to admit that I'm eager to see what will happen next.

I must be more messed up than I thought. I'm practically chasing death.

We fly past the busy city until we reach a deeper part of the jungle. Byron begins to circle, slowly bringing us closer to the ground. I tense, wrapping my legs more tightly around him.

He swears, and his breathing grows more rapid.

In response, my own pulse speeds up. That ache comes back, the one right between my thighs, and I grit my teeth. I'm supposed to be trying to frustrate this stoic gargoyle. Touching him shouldn't frustrate *me*.

We land in pretty much the only spot we can without his wings getting tangled.

My legs shake as he pulls my arms from around his neck, and I'm sure I'm going to crumble to the ground again. But to my surprise, the angry gargoyle holds me against him for a long moment, my chained hands pressed between us. I inhale, enjoying the smell of him. He smells like the wind and earth, all rolled into one. *Like freedom.*

For some reason, a shiver rolls through me. *Why does this jerk affect me like this?*

While he continues to hold me, his wings disappear, and his skin changes back to a human-like color. It might be my imagination, but his skin seems to warm beneath my touch. It feels pleasant... more than pleasant.

"Better?" he murmurs against my hair, and for a second I think the word is almost tender.

"Yeah," I whisper back, my breath puffing against his neck.

He practically leaps back from me, and it's pure luck that I manage to keep my balance. "Good, because we've got a lot to do and not a lot of time."

My hands tighten into fists. There he is again, Mr. Grumpy. "You keep saying that, but you still haven't said what we're doing or why we don't

have a lot of time.”

He strides forward and grabs my arm too roughly.

“Hey!” I jerk free of his grip. “I’m sick of this! Use your damn words!”

The flecks of gold in his brilliant hazel eyes seem to flash with warning. “You’re my prisoner, I’ll treat you however I damn well please.”

My chin lifts. “Careful. I’ve been pleasant up until this point, but if you push it, I’ll make your life hell.”

“Pleasant?” he practically snarls the word. “Is that what you call nearly fucking a strange nymph when I take my eyes off of you for one second?”

I raise a brow. “Is that what’s got your panties in a twist?”

He grabs for my arm again, but I step out of his reach. “Just shut up and come with me!”

“Not until you start treating me a little more nicely and answering some of my questions.”

He stares, breathing hard. “I’m done with this shit. Push me a little harder and see what happens.”

A challenge? I hide my smile. Boy, this asshole doesn’t know me at all.

When he grabs my arm again, I let him.

He looks relieved. I give him a minute to haul me along. I wait for his shoulders to relax and his focus to shift to our destination. And then, moving with lightning fast reflexes, I spin, kicking him as hard as I can in the groin.

A guttural shout tears from his lips and his knees hit the ground, but I don’t give him time to recover. I spin again and kick him in the face. He hits the jungle floor behind him, and I turn, racing to freedom.

I’m fast, but I don’t know how fast he is, so I don’t slow, even though my path is tangled and uneven. The shackles on my wrist make it awkward, but I manage. I barrel over branches and vines, moving further from the light of the clearing and into the shadowy darkness of the jungle. I hear him crashing through the tangled chaos behind me, and pick up my speed. It’s even darker with the sunglasses on, but I don’t dare take them off. Not ever.

My heart says he won’t hurt me, but my brain keeps flashing through my experiences with him so far. Byron has a temper, and I’m pretty sure kicking him in the crotch really pissed him off.

I sense him, too close behind me. Turning slightly, I see him. *Shit!* He's almost caught me, and his face is twisted in rage.

My feet catch on something, and suddenly, I'm falling. Pain rips through my head as my skull cracks against something. For a second, everything goes black. I don't think I'm breathing. I don't think I'm still in my body.

Then I gasp. My vision comes into focus, and Byron's face is inches from mine. I stiffen and start to fight, even though I feel weak and confused.

He catches my hands and pins them against my chest. "Stop. You're fucking hurt."

I stiffen, but don't move as he releases my hands.

He reaches up and touches my head.

I gasp as my skull gives a painful ache.

His expression grows concerned. "You're bleeding."

Closing my eyes, I take deep breaths. "It's fine. I've had worse."

He says nothing for a long time, and neither do I. My head hurts like hell, and a headache is forming behind my eyes. I've got the sudden need to sleep. The thing is, immortals don't need a lot of sleep. Flying with Byron for the past couple days hasn't been hard. I've nodded off a few times, but other than that, I've been painfully awake. But now? I just want to sleep for a month. Because we might not need to sleep, but we still enjoy it.

"I'm tired," I say, and my voice sounds different, even to my own ears.

He shifts beneath me, and I realize he's got me cradled in his lap. "Then, sleep."

I shake my head, then hiss, because it hurts like hell. "You might kill me in my sleep."

He chuckles, and the sound rolls through me like a wave, deep, beautiful, and completely unexpected. "I give you my word not to hurt you while you sleep."

The need to argue rises up inside me, but instead, I snuggle closer to him, and sleep pulls me under.

Most of my dreams are a pleasant escape from my crappy life. But this time, I dream about two gargoyles fucking me slowly.

This is definitely one dream I don't want to wake up from.



Chapter Eight

B^{yron} *I'm in big trouble.* As Medusa groans in her sleep again and moves, brushing her naked ass against my erection, I'm having a harder and harder time remembering why I can't just bury my cock deep inside of her.

This woman is the most frustrating creature I've ever met before.

I mean, she attacked me. Attacked a gargoyle! We aren't just made of stone when we transform. We're known for being strong, fast, and powerful. She had to know she didn't have a chance in hell of escaping me.

It's like she did it just to piss me off.

My mouth curls into an unexpected smile, and I gaze down at her.

And then my smile fades, carefully pulling one of my arms out from under her, I reach forward and pull her skewed sunglasses off. I forget to breathe for a long minute. She's so damn beautiful, so unbelievably beautiful, even in the shadows of the jungle.

I cannot believe she's a monster. She's more beautiful than any angel. Her long dark lashes tempt my fingertips. I want to touch them, to see if they're as soft as they look.

And I feel like a fucking jackass for even having such a dumb thought. Who wants to touch a woman's eyelashes? Who wants to stroke a woman's face to see if her skin feels as soft as they imagine?

I slide her glasses on and lean back against the trunk of the tree.

Me. I'm the jackass who wants to touch every inch of her.

If I just wanted to stroke her breasts, fondle the tips of her sweet nipples, or just bury myself inside her while I touch the soft folds of her body, that I could accept. I'm a horny gargoyle who hasn't touched a female in a good twenty years.

But her eyelashes and face? That pisses me off, because that means this isn't just arousal between us.

And I *hate* that.

Because when it comes down to it, I'll have to be the one to kill her. For the first time in my life, I don't know if I can do my job.

My brotherhood has a mission. Retrieve the monster, get her cooperation with two tasks that she is uniquely suited to help, and then take her to the sanctuary for one act before her final judgment. She may be our mortal enemy, but the survival of our people depends on her helping us. It doesn't matter if she is willing or not.

Which means I need to fix this thing between us before we reach our destination. I need to be a bigger jerk. I need her to act like a hateful bitch. I need to stop feeling my heart ache every time she looks in my direction.

I never should have stopped here. We've got time constraints, we can't delay, but here I am, watching her sleep. Because she scared me when she fell. Because, despite the fact that my gargoyle instincts should be telling me she's an enemy, I'm caring for her like she's an innocent under my protection.

Which makes absolutely no sense... my instincts have never led me wrong before.

I sigh. But for now, I run my free hand along her smooth legs, feeling my erection aching with need. I look down at her face and imagine what she'd look like laughing, or with her eyes wide as I make her come.

For now, I pretend that I haven't been sent to end her life.

Hours tick by. I nod off, holding her close, smelling her sweet lavender scent and dreaming of things that are stupid-as-hell, like waking up to see this woman naked, swelling with my child, and smiling at me.

Just stupid shit like that.

And then, I feel her stir in my arms and snap awake. The first thing she does when she awakes is feel for her glasses, and I sense her relax just a bit when she finds them in place.

I can't see her eyes beneath her sunglasses as they open, but I sense them. And immediately, I hide every dumb feeling and thought I have. The last thing I need is for her to know how I'm feeling.

"Better?"

She stretches in the sexiest damn way in the world, her perfect ass rubbing against my crotch as she moves. "Yeah. Head still hurts a bit, but I'm okay."

"Well," I clear my throat. "There's a hot spring on our way. We can stop there and clean you up a bit."

A smile twists her lips. "Are you offering to bathe me?"

I scowl. "Not a chance in hell, monster."

It hurts when her smile vanishes. "You're a real asshole, you know that."

Yeah, I am. "Just shut up."

Climbing to my feet, I keep her cradled to my chest. For some reason, I think of the moment her head hit the root. I'd been scared. More than scared. I'd panicked.

She wouldn't be getting hurt again under my care, not if I could help it. *Until you kill her, you idiot.*

"Are you planning to carry me the whole way?" she asks, looking irritated.

I picture her falling again. "I wouldn't have to if you weren't so damn clumsy."

She shoves at my chest, anger radiating from her. "Put me down."

"No."

"Put me down. Now!" she commands me.

I snarl. "No. Now, shut up. We need to get you clean before we see Eros."

She stiffens in my arms. "So, we're really seeing Eros?"

I scowl, mad I told her anything.

"I don't think that's a good idea."

I continue moving through the forest, determined not to look at her again. "I don't remember asking for your opinion."

Her hands grip the front of my shirt. "He's unstable as hell, Byron. And if we're heading where I think we are, he won't appreciate us in his temple."

"Well, fuck him, because that's where we're heading." *Damn it!* I glance down at her, annoyed when I see her satisfied expression.

"So, we're heading to his temple?" Her gaze grows thoughtful. "Why would a gargoyle want to see a god of lust? Aren't you guys incapable of getting hard or something?"

"You know damn well I can get hard!"

Her brow raises, and I want to scream that she got me to admit it. "So you *were* aroused?"

I say nothing. I'm tired of her mind games.

Her lips pucker. “So, a gargoyle who gets hard and comes while he flies wants the god of lust? Interesting.”

I bite back my response.

“But I guess it makes sense. Maybe you’re tired of exploding in your pants every time you fly.”

“I do not—“ I clench my teeth.

She looks even more satisfied. “So what is it, gargoyle? Does the wind turn you on or is it me, because you’re giving a lot of mixed messages?”

I curse softly.

To my shock, a giggle explodes from her lips, and the sound is musical. Delightful.

My anger fades. Did I really just make her laugh? And why the hell does that fact make me feel so damn proud?

“Should I keep guessing as to why we’re going to Eros?”

I break out of the jungle and come to my destination. I’ve only been here once, but nothing has changed. It’s a waterfall crashing down into a pool of heated water.

She makes a little sound. “It’s the same. So beautiful.”

Beautiful? *It's just a freaking pool.* I look again, trying to picture it through her eyes. Maybe it is a little nice.

“You’ve been here before?” That surprises me.

For a second she looks sad. “A long time ago.”

I want to ask her more. But getting to know her isn’t exactly part of the plan. *Stick to the plan.*

I take her to the edge of the water and set her down.

She looks at me first, and then down at herself, her point clear. “Do you plan to undress me now or undo my cuffs so I can undress myself?”

An image of me slowly undressing her comes into my mind. My cock bobs eagerly.

Fuck.

I frown at her, remembering the sprint we just took through the jungle. “I’ll undo your cuffs, but if you try to run for it, I’ll hog tie you.”

She holds out her hands.

Taking a deep breath, I close my eyes and touch the metal. The magical cuffs hum as I give my command, and I hear them hit the ground.

“Magic cuffs?” she says, sounding excited. “A god must have made them.”

One did, but I don't tell her that. "Go get cleaned up."

She takes a step back from me, to the very edge of the water, then reaches for the buttons on my shirt.

Fucking turn around and walk away! I command myself.

But I stand absolutely still as she slowly undoes every single button, exposing more and more of her creamy, white skin. When she gets to the last one, she grasps the sides of her shirt, and I wait, pulse racing. I tell myself that she's a flight risk, that I have to watch her. The truth is that I want to see her. I *need* to see her again.

"Byron?" her voice is soft, husky.

My pulse races.

"Turn around."

I blink stupidly at her for a second. "What?"

"Turn around, you pervy gargoyle! If you want a strip show, you might want to be a bit nicer next time."

I scowl, hating how pissed off I am. I turn my back to her.

Her shirt lands on my head, and I yank it off, turning back around.

She's already splashed into the water and her creamy flesh is hidden from my view. I stare like some pathetic loser as she dives under the water and plays. She winces as she scrubs out her hair, and I'm transfixed by every move she makes.

At last, she tilts her glasses down, and her gaze meets mine. "You know, you might want to clean up a bit, too. It's been days since you last showered, and between the cum in your pants, and your manly scent... well, I think it wouldn't be the worst idea."

I scowl, hating that she's right.

I pull off my black t-shirt and toss it on a rock near the water, along with hers. As I start to undo the zipper and button on my pants, I find her staring at me.

"Can't control yourself?" I ask.

She shoots me an arrogant look and turns her back to me.

Satisfied, I strip off my jeans, boxers, sneakers, and socks. I set them on the rock, and wade into the waters. Ignoring her entirely, I wash.

When I hear her swimming, I can't help but look. She's going beneath the waterfall.

Like a magnet, I follow her.

When she swims beneath it, she tilts her head back so that the edge of the water hits her hair. I'm transfixed. She's like a water nymph, beautiful and tempting.

"Coming?" she asks, looking at me.

I move closer, standing beneath the falling water beside her. I'm tempted to pull her into my arms. I'm tempted to fuck her right here in this perfect moment, but I don't.

I don't.

The fact that I hold back... I'm pretty sure this will be one of my life's greatest regrets.

Yet, I can't. I can't fuck the woman I intend to kill. I can't break my vow of celibacy.

Soon, one of the female gargoyles will give birth. Once she does, all the males will be allowed to mate her again. At least the males she desires, and she's made it clear that my brothers and I are at the top of her list.

We can finally touch a woman. We can finally try to have a child.

But only if we follow the rules. We can satisfy ourselves, but we can't have sex. The Elites believe our sperm is more powerful this way, and with our kind dying out, only the males who have controlled themselves can mate with a female gargoyle. Having sex with this woman would mean giving up twenty years of careful control. And it'd mean giving up my hope of ever having a child.

So, I hold back.

The moment passes. She looks away from me, and I swear there's disappointment in her eyes. With her glasses, I can't be sure.

"I'm done if you are," she says after a moment.

I nod.

We head back to shore. We're only a short walk from Eros' temple, and then the real work begins. A lot of people have tried to steal his fertility figure, but none have succeeded. But then, Eros is a seriously fucked up God who apparently has a soft spot for female monsters, so I think Medusa is our one chance at getting in the door without getting caught.

After that though, we still have to get lucky. I've heard the statue only appears when Eros is present, when he's using his powers to lure humans to him. So step one is getting Medusa inside. Step two is actually just being in the right place at the right time.

Because if I don't get that fertility figure, I'll let down my entire race. We need it to ensure the female gargoyles conceive again. I can't let them down.

I won't.

When we reach the shore, I freeze. Our clothes are gone.

"Fuck. Where are they?"

She sighs behind me. "Eros' people."

I whirl on her. "His *people*?"

"His magic lures humans to him. They come from the city to his temple, compelled by his magic. Many of them end up in this hot spring. Sometimes his people steal their clothes."

"So you knew this would happen?" I can't keep the anger out of my voice. I have a hell of a lot to do, and I'm pretty sure it'll be a lot harder to do naked.

And, when I glance at the tops of her breasts over the water, I reluctantly admit that she'll be harder to resist too.

To my annoyance, she crosses her arms angrily in front of her chest. "You think I want to be naked with you, asshole? Because I don't. I just figured his people would know we weren't human."

I shake my head. "And how would they know that?"

She shrugs.

I grit my teeth together. "Well, this is just great."

"Relax. I'm sure there are clothes scattered all around his temple. We're going there anyway."

She's right. "Fine, but keep your hands to yourself."

She snorts. "Yeah, right. I'm not the one who is constantly hard."

Turning, she heads out of the water. I hate that I watch her every move. I hate that I love the way her wet hair hangs down her back, and I hate how much I love the sweet curves of her round ass.

I leave the water too, and reach down, snagging the cuffs. She glances back at me, and her eyes widen. "You can't be serious."

"Just in case," I mutter.

Then, her gaze moves down.

I know she's staring right at my hard dick. And there's not a damn thing I can do about it.

"Gargoyles are always hard," I tell her defensively.

She laughs. "At least you've got something to be proud of." Turning, she looks toward the jungle. "It's that way, right?"

I'm feeling a little too happy about her complimenting my junk, so it takes me a minute to respond. "Yup."

Then, we start the longest hike of my life, as I walk along, dick hard, and a beautiful naked woman in front of me.

And did I mention that I'm celibate?

The Gods must be laughing their asses off at me.



Chapter Nine

M^{edusa}

Just as I expected, we do find clothes scattered around the outside of the temple, but it's evening by the time we're dressed. I managed to find a yellow sundress, and Byron squeezed into clothes a size too small. The green shirt barely buttoned over his broad shoulders and leaves spaces exposed between each button. The khaki shorts had to be left unbuttoned at the top, and to my enjoyment, they leave absolutely nothing to the imagination.

It takes all my willpower to look away from the hunk of a man, but I'll be damned if I let him catch me staring again. Instead, I turn my attention to the sunset above the trees. To my surprise, the sky is strangely beautiful tonight. I lift my sunglasses and peek below—I can't remember the last time I actually watched the sunset and noticed the way the reds and oranges stand out against the dark blue of the sky in the evenings.

My mind goes back to my apartment, my ex, and my empty life. It's kind of strange that it took being kidnapped by gargoyles to realize just how bad things had gotten for me. When I get back, if I get back, some things are going to change.

I feel Byron staring from beside me. "What?"

"You know that your gaze doesn't affect gargoyles. So why do you worry about your sunglasses so much? It's just the two of us."

I shrug. "Habit I guess. If someone were to come up and startle me, and then die because of it, well... I couldn't live with that."

I lower my sunglasses. Shields back in place. "I've been thinking about what I'm going to do when I get back home."

His expression grows troubled. "You got people worrying about you?"

Folding my arms over my chest, I look at the sunset again. "Peter's probably going a bit nuts, but other than that—"

"Who's Peter?" he asks, frowning.

"He works for the Special Unit." *And he broke my heart.* "And he worries about me."

“You have a boyfriend in the Special Unit?” He looks shocked.

His reaction hurts. *Medusa has a boyfriend?* How unbelievable! Who would want to be with that disgusting monster? *Who indeed?*

Even though he’s kind of right.

My chest hurts as I glare at him. “Surprised?”

“Surprised?” he repeats, and his entire chest seems to swell. “And what about the nymph you were about to fuck? Would your *boyfriend* be happy about that?”

The venom in his voice sends rage boiling through my blood. “None of your damned business!”

I hear his teeth grind together. “Forget it. I shouldn’t have expected differently from one of your kind.”

Your kind. “Asshole.”

He turns away from me and starts walking. “We’ve wasted too much time here. We need to get into the temple and out of it without Eros spotting us, so keep up and keep quiet.”

“Yes, sir!” I respond sarcastically, but stand up to follow him. “And what exactly are we doing in his temple in the first place?”

He doesn’t answer me. *Of course not.*

I stomp through the jungle. “You know Eros will kill us if he thinks we’re there for anything but complete debauchery, right? And gargoyles kind of have a reputation for ruining that kind of fun.”

He continues ignoring me.

Whatever.

As we get closer, we hear the temple music. It grows in volume and rhythm with each step forward, some strange song with unidentifiable instruments and loud bass that thumps even the ground beneath our feet. We exchange a look, then continue through the jungle a little more slowly until we reach the temple.

It’s made of grey brick and looks simple from the outside, but I can feel the power of the glamour washing over the structure. The glamour is strong, stronger than anything I could create.

Then, I hear laughter.

We both freeze and watch as two humans emerge from a path to one side. The man and woman are touching, grabbing each other, and stumbling toward the temple.

Frowning, I close my eyes, feeling for magic. There, just on the edge of my awareness, is Eros' magic. It has little effect on immortals, but it's strong enough to lure humans anywhere close by straight to him.

"Come on," Byron whispers.

We step out of the shadows and a brilliant golden light suddenly illuminates the massive door that leads into the temple.

I look to Byron. "Should we be worried?"

"Just be careful. We get in, get what we need, and get out."

My eyes widen. "We're stealing from him!"

He shushes me, grabbing my arm. "Are you trying to get us killed?"

"No, but apparently you are! I'm not doing this."

His eyes narrow. "You're not doing anything except staying where I can see you while I get what I came here for."

"Fuck," I mutter. "You're insane."

"Just keep up." He holds the cuffs up. "Or these go right back on."

I don't want to do this, but I obey. He might think it's because he has some control over me, but he doesn't.

The thing is, Eros is completely insane, and he has been known to impose awful punishments. If he finds a gargoyle in his temple, he's going to be suspicious. I have a feeling that I can help the situation if needed. I am a decently attractive woman, after all, and Eros is the god of lust. I'm sure he'd love to find one of my kind in his temple, as long as he thought I was there to feed his powers. For some kind of hot sex.

I stay with this stubborn, asshole gargoyle, not because I have to, but because I don't want him getting killed. Even though he's a jerk.

We creep up the steps. The instant our feet touches the first step, the temple transforms. Instead of looking like ancient stone with green moss growing slowly up the abandoned structure, it looks the way it did when it was first built. With polished stone, and a beauty that swells from it.

When we move inside the entrance, we both pause. White stone pillars are in a circle on the outside of the massive room. In the center, a pool of crystal blue water bubbles. Along the outside of the pool? Humans fuck on the dozen or so beds that form a perfect circle.

My jaw drops.

I shouldn't be so surprised. Eros is the god of lust after all, but I didn't expect this for a second. A few humans having sex on the floor? Yes. But a

dozen of them on white, fluffy beds with clear curtains around them? Not so much.

It's probably a glamour. All this beauty and elegance stinks of a glamour, but it's a very convincing one.

"There!" Byron whispers.

I follow his gaze. Across the room, in a little alcove with a small light beaming down on it is an ugly little statue. The man-thing has a twisted face, large breasts, and a cock that's longer than the little statue itself.

"That's what we're risking our lives for?" I hiss under my breath.

He ignores me and takes a step forward.

I catch his arm. Eros' people emerge from the shadows of the little rooms tucked in the darkness beyond the pillars. They're tiny creatures, painted in gold, with little loin cloths covering their junk. They carry stone mugs with blue liquid that they pass them out to the people. The humans stop their activities long enough to drain the drinks, then the little creatures take the empty cups back.

"Drugs?" Byron whispers.

"I bet they have a drop of ambrosia in them."

A drop would do nothing to an immortal, but a human? It was like a horny pill, keeping them aroused all night long.

"Come on," he murmurs, then leads me carefully around the outside of the room, trying to keep us in the shadows.

Shit. I guess we better just hope no one spots us. Great plan... really great.

To my shock, we reach the statue without being spotted, and Byron hands the figure to me. I stare at it in confusion. He points at my dress.

Is he serious? Oh right, his outfit's already bursting off. He has zero chance of concealing it there.

Glaring at him, I grab it and stuff it under my dress, cradling it near my belly like a baby.

Then, we turn and start back. Which is exactly when the shit hits the fan.

One of the little creatures is suddenly in front of us, staring in excitement. He takes Byron's arm and pulls him toward the center of the room. I try to take a step back, but two more of the creatures are behind me, pushing me forward.

It's hard to breathe. Do they know what we are? Do they know why we're here?

And are we lucky enough to be here without Eros?

They take us to one of the beds. The only empty one.

For a second we both blink stupidly, and then Byron spins toward me, grabs me, and shoves me down on the bed.

I give a shriek of surprise, and then he's on top of me, careful of the statue.

There's no time to react, no time to think, when Byron's lips suddenly touch mine. For a minute, they're crushing, frantic, and then our kiss changes. His mouth gentles, and it's like the air in the room changes too. I hold myself still, and slowly feel myself relax. His lips are nice. Warm. Shockingly gentle.

I sigh and lift one of my hands to tangle into the back of his hair, drawing him closer.

He pulls back from the kiss. His face is inches from mine. And for a second I'm lost in his intense gaze. His hazel eyes, a beautiful scattering of gold across a greenish-blue, seem to draw me in.

For the first time, I'm tempted to touch his face. To run my fingers along his scruff of a beard. I want to know if it feels as rough as it looks. And I want to know what his expressive eyes will do if I touch him.

I feel his hand move up my outer thigh. I can't breathe for a painful second as his fingertips graze the skin of my hip, and then, I nearly jerk in surprise as he grabs the figure against my stomach.

Regret makes my chest ache. That's what this is all about. The figure. Putting a show on for Eros' people, so they don't know why we're here. The look I thought I saw in his eyes... the way I thought the kiss changed... it was all a load of shit.

He moves the statue so it's lying to the side of us, still in my skirts. Then, he rises above me and undoes his shirt.

I hate how my gaze clings to the hard, fine lines of his chest and stomach. And when he strips off the shirt and puts it beside us, all I can see are the muscles of his arms. Big, strong.

If he wasn't Byron, if this wasn't all an act, I'd reach up, curl my hands around his arms, and touch the tempting muscles like I owned them, like he was mine.

He reaches for the statue again, and hides it in his shirt beside us.

I see the relief on his face when he's done, and he settles over me a little less tensely. His gaze focuses back on me, and for the life of me I don't know what he's thinking. Probably something about me being a monster again.

Instead, he places his arms on both sides of my head, capturing me beneath him in a way that makes every muscle in my body heat up.

"What now?" I whisper.

"Fuck if I know," he says, but his gaze is on my lips.

It takes a second to remember to breathe. "I guess just stay like this until they're not looking."

"Yeah." He shifts again, and I'm pleasantly aware of his erection yet again.

Closing my eyes, I picture it. Gods, no wonder this man was so cocky. He's huge. Perfect. Long and thick and unlike anything I've seen before. He's got the kind of dick that a woman dreams about riding to ecstasy.

Damn him. I wish he had a tiny nub. I could stop fantasizing about some shriveled up, crooked mess.

"Why don't you have snakes?"

My eyes fly open. He's still staring. "Snakes?"

"In your hair?"

I laugh. "That's just a myth. Like gargoyles being monstrous."

To my surprise, his lips curl into a studly smile. "Are you saying I'm handsome?"

I raise a brow. "You know damn well you're good looking. I'm sure the gargoyle ladies are all over you."

His smile fades. "Not so much."

"So you're not constantly banging?"

He looks even more miserable. "No, it's been a long time since I..."

"Banged?" I smile, feeling a bit better. "Is that why your control is so shitty?"

He makes a sound, almost like a laugh, and then he stiffens. "Not all of us are in relationships."

Staring down at his chest, I bring my hands up from my sides, placing them between us. "I didn't exactly say I was in a relationship."

"Your boyfriend—"

"My ex."

He looks smug again. "So that's why you were considering *banging* the water nymph?"

I smack his chest. "What is with you and this nymph?"

"I don't know." And his voice takes on a strange tone. "I guess I thought after you'd spent the day riding my dick, I wouldn't immediately find you naked with a nymph."

"You're jealous!"

His gaze narrows. "I'm not!"

"You so are!" I laugh. "Oh my goodness, you're jealous of a nymph!"

"I'm not!" he growls.

But I can't hold back my laughter. "Oh come on, did you really think I was going to just start having sex with a stranger? He just interrupted..."

I clamp my mouth shut.

But it's too late. He grins. "Interrupted what?"

I can see him searching his memories. And I know the second he remembers, because his expression grows triumphant. "You were getting yourself off!"

My damn cheeks grow hot. "Whatever. I'm a big girl. I can do what I want."

He settles himself more deeply between my thighs, and my entire core hums at his erection pressing between my legs. "So, maybe I'm not only one who enjoyed our flight."

I find myself stroking his chest. "I think Eros' magic might be affecting us a bit, because I don't think I remember you ever being this talkative. Or charming."

"I'm charming?" he grins. "I don't think I've ever been called that before."

A strange chattering comes near our heads. We look to find two of Eros' people holding out cups. We take them, chug the drinks, and give them back.

I freeze, licking my lips. That tasted familiar.

"Was that straight ambrosia?" Byron asks, a strange note to his voice.

My thoughts grow fuzzy, and I let out a little breath. "That doesn't make sense. A cup of ambrosia would kill a human."

The world grows brighter. Turning my head to the side, I see Eros standing in the shadows. The god wears a golden robe, like some kind of

playboy. It's tied loosely, revealing his furry chest and aroused dick. And, he's watching us, a twinkle in his eyes that I don't like.

Byron groans above me, and I turn back to him.

His eyes are squeezed shut. His jaw locks, and I swear he's fighting something.

"Byron?"

His eyes snap open, and I'm overwhelmed by the raw desire in his gaze. "Fuck it."

I don't have time to react. His lips descend on mine, and I'm lost. His lips taste like heaven, a smoky sweetness that makes me burn from the inside out.

I grab his hair and pull him closer. And this time, he doesn't jerk away. His kiss deepens. His hands move to my hips, and he pulls me harder against his erection.

All thoughts are gone. Just a need to have this man inside me.

I wrap my legs around his back, and he groans above me, breaking our kiss.

His hands slide beneath my dress, and in seconds, he's lifting it off of me and tossing it next to us. His expression is desperate as he leans down, his mouth closing around one of my nipples. I moan, holding him closer as he feverishly licks and sucks, while his hands roam over my breasts.

This man is something else. Because it's like he's starved for my breasts. He licks, sucks, and nibbles on them. Every time I think he's finished, he presses his face in the valley of my breasts, and breathes as if he's trying to control himself, his thumb rolling my nipples, then, a second later, he returns to them. I've never been lavished like this before. And I love every second of it.

But he's not the only one who gets to have fun.

I tug his head back, then run my hands down his chest to his pants. He watches my every move, his eyes dark and full of need as I slide the zipper down on his shorts.

I swear to the gods that when I pull his long shaft free our bodies shudder together. Stroking him up and down, I hold him like I own every inch of it. I drink in the look on his face. The one that says he's overwhelmed with need.

My hands curl more tightly around him, and my speed increases as I pump him. His long shaft feels as hard as metal beneath my touch, and my

mind spins with the image of riding this beautiful cock.

He shudders again above me, swears, and pushes my hand away.

Shedding his shorts, I think he's going to plunge into me. I *want* him to plunge into me.

Instead, his head drops between my thighs and I gasp as his lips press into my folds. It's unreal. A dream. A fantasy I'm going to wake up from, dripping wet.

He's so good. Oh so good. His touch gentle, coaxing my arousal higher and higher. He brushes his lips inside of me, electrifying me. And when he starts to lick, I cry out his name, feeling myself about to lose control.

"Byron," I pant. "I need you."

He raises his mouth, and I'm amazed by how he looks at me.

Moving up my body, he lays on top of me again. Grabbing my wrists, he moves them so they're above my head, then presses them to the bed.

"Want me to fuck you?"

I nod.

"I need you to say it," he growls.

"Fuck me."

He leans forward and bites my ear. Then, hot breath panting against me, he whispers. "You keep your eyes open. I want you to know it's me inside of you. Me fucking you."

Goose bumps move across my skin, but all I can do is nod.

Putting both my wrists into one of his hands, he reaches down with his free one and grabs my hip. My legs lift and curl around his back once more. Immediately, I gasp. His tip is at my entrance. He dips himself lower, right into my wet folds.

I can't breathe. It feels incredible.

His tip shifts, sliding in my wetness, but not entering me. I move my hips, brushing myself harder against him. His breathing increases, and then he's easing into me.

My body quivers. He's massive. Barely squeezing into my tight channel. If I wasn't so wet, so ready, there's no way I could take this big gargoyle.

But I am ready. And the size of him, along with my slickness, creates the most delicious friction.

If he wasn't holding down my wrists, my entire body would be lifting off this bed. But instead, he keeps me in place as he slides deeper and

deeper.

When he gets to his hilt, he kisses my ear. “Your pussy is the tightest fucking thing I’ve ever felt, and I’m going to make it mine.”

I nod, and he kisses down my throat.

When he pulls back out, my eyes fly open and lock with his. And then, he’s plunging back in.

I have no words. No thoughts. Nothing.

This feeling is unreal. It’s bringing me to life. Awakening within me things that I thought were dead.

When he moves his hips, thrusting in and out of me, I’m lost. I cling to him, letting this big gargoyle take me closer to the edge with each movement. I strain against the hand that pins me down, but there’s no escape. I’m his. His to do with what he wishes.

And what he wants... it’s exactly what I want.

In and out. In and out. A perfect moment I never want to end.

But the end is near, bright and real. Each second I’m brought closer and closer until at last, I cry out, and tumble over the edge. I’m nothing but nerves. But pleasure.

This feeling... it’s like a beautiful death. Or maybe a rebirth.

The woman I was is gone, replaced by this bright light. A being of just feelings.

He shudders above me, and I feel him explode inside of me. His cum is warm and delicious. He continues to move inside of me, his sticky sweetness coating us both.

After several long seconds, he collapses on top of me.

We lay that way for a long time, and then he slowly lifts his head up and looks at me. He doesn’t say a word, but he doesn’t need to. He felt it too. Whatever this is. It’s powerful.

Instead, of speaking, he reaches down and starts to stroke my clit.

“Byron!” I gasp.

“Now, you’re going to turn around, and I’m going to fuck you all over again.”

My body quivers in anticipation.

This is going to be a long night. And I don’t mind it one bit.



Chapter Ten

Forrest

I'm crouching in the shadows of the jungle, with Harold breathing down my neck. "Where the hell is he?"

"I don't know," Harold whispers, looking to the bright temple. "But he should be out by now."

This isn't good. Byron is a soldier. And he's damned good at his job. If he hasn't come out yet, it's because something went wrong.

Two people stumble through a path in the woods, laughing drunkenly. They head into the temple, and disappear.

I sigh, standing up. "I think we need to go in."

"How?" Harold asks. "If Eros catches us, he'll mount us to the top of his temple for eternity. If we're lucky."

I look at my brother. "We just try to blend in."

His brows disappear into his blond hair. "I'm not pretending to want to have sex with you."

I laugh. "Fuck, that's gross. No, we just act like his magic is calling us. We'll figure out what to do next once we get inside."

Harold runs his hand through his hair. "I guess I don't have a better plan."

"Darn right. Let's go."

We try to act like two people drunk on the lustful magic that draws the humans to this place, but Harold does an awful job. Me? I'm not so bad.

When we are almost in the room, we see the two people who came in ahead of us. A tiny creature taps their shoulders and hands them drinks. The two chug them, and then go right back to making out.

I wait until Eros' little creatures leave, then start forward through the entryway and into the massive room. We stand in the shadows for a moment, staring around the room. There are a lot of humans having sex on beds around the room, and even a few fucking in the little bubbling tub in the center of the room.

But where's Byron?

And then... I see him. And I can't stop seeing him.

A woman is on top of him. No, not a woman. A goddess. I know her immediately as Medusa, not just because of her dark glasses, but because of her description.

Her hands are in her dark hair as she rides my brother. Her eyes are closed, and her head is thrown back. She's got the kind of face that men dream of, but my gaze slides past it to her breasts. They're beautiful. Just big enough to fit in my hands. And even though she's a small girl, I don't think I'd need more than her beautiful pink-tipped breasts.

I imagine myself sliding between them. *I bet they'd wrap my cock just perfectly.*

And then, I look further down. Over her smooth stomach to her pussy. My brother is inside her. She's bare, open, and I can see how wet she is from here.

Gods damn it, I'm going to lose it. I've never wanted a woman like this before.

But I'm celibate. Like my brother! Well, like my brother *was*!

And yet, if she came to me and wrapped those legs around me... I wouldn't turn her away.

One of the little creatures presses a mug into my hands. I drink it without thought, aware that's what a human would do in this situation, and barely feel it as they take it back from me.

Harold gives his empty drink back to the creature and comes to stand next to me. "What is he doing?"

"*Her*, apparently."

"But Byron isn't like that. He's focused. Dedicated." He grabs his head. "Shit, is your head spinning?"

My head isn't spinning, but my vision is blurring. I move to the woman as if compelled by a force greater than myself. I sense Harold moving beside me, and suddenly, we're both standing in front of her.

Byron's gaze swings to us. "What are you waiting for?"

Her head turns to us. "Harold... and you're...?" her question is broken off by a moan.

"Forrest," I mumble, curling my hands to stop from touching her.

Her lips quirk. "Well, I think you boys are overdressed."

I freeze. *Did I hear her right?* "You want us inside of you?"

She smiles, presses her hands onto Byron's shoulders and rides him harder. "Better hurry."

I swear to the gods I've never gotten my clothes off that fast. But in seconds, I'm naked. And so is Harold.

The bastard doesn't hesitate for a second. He climbs on the bed behind her and positions himself at her ass. At first I think he's going to plunge right in, but instead he runs his hand down her back while he reaches for her ass. His thumb presses inside of her, and she groans and bucks against him.

I'm so fucking turned on I think I might lose my mind. But then, she lifts her head, grabs my dick, and pulls me closer. When her tongue licks my tip, a string of curses explode from my lips. This woman isn't a goddess. She's a damned siren, luring me to my doom.

Unlike those freaking sirens who had to imprison me to keep me from leaving.

And yet, as she begins to lick my balls I don't give a damn. I dig my hands into the back of her hair and pull her closer. When she takes my shaft deep into her throat, I growl and thrust all the way in.

She chokes around my shaft as Harold thrusts into her from behind. For a second I think about pulling back, and then she starts to hum. I'm in fucking heaven. Or maybe hell.

I'm thrusting, and she's taking every damn inch of me. And my dick is shaking with a need to explode. In that second I'm glad I masturbated just a few hours earlier, or else things would be over long before they started.

And yet, she's so freaking good. Her hot mouth seals around me like something made for draining a man's seed.

I grab her hair and force her to take me deeper, feeling my head spinning as I get closer and closer to the edge. Watching my brothers inside of her doesn't help my control. They thrust in and out, taking her like madmen as she moves against them.

It's strangely erotic. Feeling her sucking me, while I watch them fuck her. When she scrapes her teeth gently along my shaft, I fucking explode, filling her with my cum.

This god damn siren doesn't mind one bit. She sucks me clean as she orgasms with the two dicks inside of her, then, finally, lets me pop out of her mouth.

Collapsing between my two satisfied brothers, she gazes up at me.

“Want to try it in the water next?”

I think the three of us more than made up for our twenty years of celibacy. We took turns fucking her. We fucked her at the same time. Hell, we fucked her upside down.

And then, we climbed into bed around her, holding her as if she was our whole world.

“I think I love you,” Harold whispered, kissing her neck.

She laughed softly. “All right, big boy. All right.”

I don’t know what I thought would happen next, but hours later I opened my eyes. My head no longer swam. The temple no longer blazed with a golden light. Instead, we were lying on a massive, flat stone. Not a soft bed. Sleeping humans were lying on the same stone beds. All the beauty and magic of the night was gone. All that remained was the sun’s early morning light just barely illuminating the temple.

Rubbing my head, I untangled myself from the pile of naked limbs and stare at our bed. Medusa was a beauty between us. Her glasses askew. Her hair tangled around her like a lover. She was the most incredible creature I’d ever come into contact with.

And yet, last night some ambrosia made us throw away twenty years of celibacy.

The thought makes me feel as if I’ve swallowed a stone. We had a plan for the future. We’d finally get a chance at impregnating one of the female gargoyles. Of having a child.

Shit. What did we do?

It was strange. I feel sick at the idea that our plans are ruined. But did I regret my night with the woman?

I didn’t know.

And that bothers me.

But how will Byron react? He was going to be angry. Having a woman and a child had been his obsession for years.

Damn it, well, I guess we have to handle this, either way.

“Byron? Harold?” I whisper, shaking the two gargoyles. They winced and wrap themselves more securely around the beautiful woman.

Sorry guys, we have to get back to reality.

Shaking them again, I watch as Byron’s eyes slide open. Without hesitation, he shoots awake, panic in his eyes. Looking down at Medusa, his eyes widen.

He shoves away from her, waking both her and Harold.

“What’s wrong?” she mumbles, sleepily.

“We fucked you, that’s what’s wrong!” he shouts.

Some of the humans start to stir.

They’re going to have a lot of questions. Questions we don’t want to answer.

“We need to get out of here,” I say, feeling panicked.

Medusa scrambles off the bed, grabbing her dress and putting it on in a rush. Then, she moves away from us to hover near the entrance to the temple, her arms wrapped around her body in a way that’s strangely vulnerable. I have the sudden urge to go to her and pull her into a hug.

Yes, we were all facing the fact that we’d lost our future.

But she’d been drugged by freakin’ Eros too. Had she even wanted to sleep with her kidnappers? The question makes me feel sick.

I rise, dressing and stuffing my feet into my shoes. Adjusting my t-shirt, I move to her. “Medusa?”

Her shoulders stiffen, and she doesn’t look back at me. “Yup?”

The bravo in her voice seems at such odds with her hunched shoulders and tightly clenched arms that I don’t know quite what to expect.

“Are you okay?”

She turns, and I know she’s staring at me, even though I can’t quite see her eyes through her sunglasses. “Of course, why wouldn’t I be?”

I move a little closer, watching the sun rising about the jungle top. “Maybe because of all the sex and drugs?” I try to keep my voice light and teasing, hoping to put her more at ease.

“You’re three hot gargoyles. I’m the monster. If anyone’s regretting last night, I’m thinking it’s the three of you.”

I’m shocked by how cruel her words are to herself. “You’re a beautiful woman who got drugged into sleeping with three men she barely knows. You have a right to be upset.”

Her shoulders shake a little, and I curse myself for being so blunt. “Whatever, it’s fine.”

“It’s not,” I tell her, and I’m surprised by the anger in my voice. I’m not an angry guy. I’m a guy who likes to joke and laugh. “If I ever see that fucking Eros, I’m going to punch him in the face just for you.”

To my surprise, she laughs. “I think that might be the nicest thing anyone has ever said to me.”

“Then you must be surrounded by a lot of assholes,” I blurt out.

She finally releases her arms and turns to look at me. She's so damn beautiful in the morning light. “What, have you been stalking me?”

I feel my face wrinkle in confusion.

She leans closer. “Because the only men I know are assholes.”

My smile comes easily. “That can't be true.”

We both jump a little as Byron pushes between us, muttering curses.

She looks at me again and raises a brow.

For some reason, I start to laugh. In seconds, she's laughing too.

The pressure on my chest lessens. I didn't like the thought of her regretting her night with us, with her hating me.

Harold comes slowly behind us. “We need to get out of here.”

I stiffen. “But the artifact—“

“We got it.”

He can't seem to look up. His blond hair is an absolute mess, and he looks like he wishes he could force his massive frame to be less noticeable.

And I know why. Because suddenly all the beauty of this morning is gone.

We've gotten what we need here. We have more to do, but each step brings us closer to home.

Which means Medusa doesn't have much longer to live.



Chapter Eleven

M^{edusa}

Byron won't touch me. He won't go anywhere near me, and his rejection hurts on a level that's absolutely bat-shit stupid. I've lived a thousand lives. I've had a million moments of heartache. And some moments that were really, really bad.

I shouldn't care that he's rejecting me now, that he regrets our night together.

But it still hurts.

When it's time for us to go, Byron reshackles my wrists, and I'm shocked that I wasn't thinking clearly. I should have tried to make a break for it. I shouldn't have allowed him anywhere near me with these things.

But they've fucked all my logic out of me.

"Where are you taking me now?"

"I'm not taking you anywhere!" He snarls at me, clenching that fucking ugly artifact more tightly.

I open my mouth to ask him what the plan is then, when he shoves me toward Harold. "You take her!"

His words are more a blow to me than his touch. *Was being with me really that bad?*

I don't care! I tell myself. If he thinks I want to be anywhere near his dumb ass, then he's as stupid as he looks.

Harold, on the other hand, is being strangely shy. When I lift my arms and put them around his neck, he avoids my gaze and places his hands lightly on my waist.

"Are you ready?" he asks, too softly.

"It's not like I have a choice," I tell him.

His brilliant blue eyes lift to meet mine, and I'm lost. For his massive size, this Harold really is a gentle giant. The way he looks at me, as if I'm some pretty girl he has a crush on, warms my bitter heart.

"I'll go slowly," he tells me.

A second later, his flesh turns to hard stone, and his wings spread out behind his massive frame. I take a deep breath and jump to wrap my legs around his waist.

I hear his teeth grit together, and then, he leaps into the air. As his wings flap harder and faster, we rise higher above the jungle. I look at the greenery beneath us with a strange mixture of feelings. My night with the three gargoyles was easily the best one of my life. But knowing that, at the very least, Byron regrets it, makes me feel terrible.

Even more like an ugly freak.

I press my face against Harold's chest, and as we fly, I'm ashamed to say silent tears run down my cheeks, whipping away in the wind. I don't know why this should be any different. I've felt undesirable and despised my entire life. So I'm really crying over nothing.

Just the same old crap.

When hours and hours later, we land gently, I'm almost sure I was asleep. But when Harold untangles himself from my grip and sets me down in the grass, I realize we're in an orchard. Immediately, the only thing I can smell is oranges. Inhaling deeply, I don't even care how stupid I look. I lie back on the grass and stare up at the clouds, feeling... not relaxed, but something I can't quite place.

Harold comes back a second later, blocking my vision of the clouds. "Orange?" he asks, holding it out to me.

I smile at the sweet sincerity in his voice and struggle to a sitting position, using my cuffed hands.

To my surprise, he peels my orange for me before handing it to me, and then sits down next to me, so close our thighs touch. We eat in silence for a while, comfortably. Enjoying a quiet moment before I have to go and ruin it, of course.

"Where are the other two?"

He slows in his eating. "I let them get a little ahead of us, so we could stop without them bugging us."

Ah, well that's kind of nice.

I smile. "Thanks."

"I just..." he seems to struggle with the right words. "I felt you crying."

My smile vanishes and suddenly I'm not hungry anymore. "Sorry."

"You're apologizing for being upset?" He laughs, and it's a kind laugh. One that rings through me like a beautiful bell. "Everyone cries

sometimes. I just wanted to know why.”

I shrug. Usually I lie about this kind of shit. But for some reason, I don’t really feel like lying today.

“Byron seemed pretty upset about last night.”

Harold stares at me, waiting. And for some reason, there’s no pressure behind his silence, just a willingness to let me talk.

I chuck the remainder of my orange on the ground and glare at where it falls. “This isn’t the first time someone’s regretted being with one of my kind. It’s stupid that it bugs me.”

His brows draw into a line on his forehead. “This isn’t about you.”

He looks as if he’s debating with himself.

Poor thing can’t even bring himself to be mean to someone he considers a monster.

“It’s okay. I know what I am. I know how others see me.”

He shakes his head. “No, I meant it when I said it isn’t about you.” He pauses for a long minute. “The thing is, our people are dying out. And the priority of our Elites has become solely focused upon building our numbers.”

“Why are there so few of you?”

My mind ran through every possibility, before Harold answered my question.

“Not many humans carved female gargoyles, and female births are uncommon. And—”

“So,” I interrupt, not able to keep my mouth from running, “gargoyles are either created or born, and either way there aren’t a lot of females, so your kind are dying out.”

He nods. “And because of that, there are very specific requirements for any males who will be given a chance to impregnate one of the few gargoyle females. One of which is for us to remain celibate...which we’ve successfully managed to do for the last twenty years. But, because of our night with you, we’re no longer allowed to have a mate or child.”

“What?” I can’t hide my shock. “That’s stupid. One night with me shouldn’t cost you everything. I mean, we were drugged.”

He shrugs. “It’s simply our way.”

“No,” I tell him. “You three aren’t going to say a word about what happened between us, and you’re not going to lose everything.”

He stares at me as if I’m crazy. “We can’t lie.”

“Why the hell not?”

“Because—“

“Eros drugged us. You guys wouldn’t have slept with me otherwise.”

It takes him a long time to answer. “It’s okay. I just wanted you to know that Byron isn’t mad at you. He just gets mean when he wants to push someone away. He tried that with me, years ago.” He smiles as he says the last part.

Harold rises and gathers more oranges, ending our serious conversation. He peels two more oranges while I watch him, fascinated yet again by how such a big man can be so gentle. With a shy smile, he hands one of them to me and sits back down.

While we eat, we chat about the most normal things. He asks me about life among the humans. We talk about my many jobs, my friends—I even tell him about my ex. Never did he seem to judge me. Instead, he asked questions, seemed interested, and made me feel... special.

At last, he grew quiet. “We have to keep going.”

“To...”

He seems to consider my question for a second. “Eventually, to our home.”

“Why?”

His shoulders stiffened. “Because, we need your help.”

I hate that I know he’s lying. I hate that I know there’s more going on here than I understand.

That alone should send me running from these gargoyles, searching for a chance at escape.

But instead, I take the hand he offers me, raise my arms to wrap around his huge neck, and snuggle closer as we rise into the sky.

Because I want this feeling to never end. This sense, almost like... almost like I’m loved, or at the least cared for.

And the second I return to reality, this is gone forever.

I’m not naïve. I don’t think they’re taking me somewhere to shower me with hot sex and candies. The thing is, I’m Medusa. I’ve lived for a very long time. If these gargoyles wish me harm, they aren’t the first ones.

So maybe—just maybe—going with them is worth the risk.



Chapter Twelve

B^{yron}

I can't believe I lost control like that. I can't believe I lost *all* control. And the worst part of it all? It wasn't just the drugs. Yeah, they didn't help matters, but I've been on the edge since I met this woman. It's like my brain packed its bags and took a vacation and my dick is screaming, "Fuck her! Fuck her so hard she never remembers another cock but yours!"

And shit, I think my dick is an asshole, because I don't think Medusa suddenly only wants me. But my cock? It only wants her. It wants to sink right back into her. It wants to plunge right back into her mouth. It wants to see if we can make her scream out in pleasure as I plunge into her tight ass.

My head keeps reminding me that we have a female gargoyle, Ashunda, who has made it clear we're the next males on her list. In a couple months she'll have her baby, and then she's going to be in our bed night after night until she gives *us* a baby. It's everything I've ever wanted.

And yet... my stupid cock doesn't even perk up at the thought of beautiful Ashunda.

No, but it hardens into a pole every time my thoughts turn to Medusa.

I'm so fucked. So completely fucked.

Then there's the other thing, if we tell the Elites about our... misstep, everything is ruined anyway. Even if Ashunda is disappointed, we won't be eligible mates anymore. She'll have to go onto her next choice.

I can't wait another twenty years for a chance at a mate and baby. I just can't!

The wind stirs beside me. I see Forrest has finally caught up to me.

He raises a brow. "Did you decide what to do?"

"About what?" I snarl at him.

"Do we tell the Elites about what happened?"

I exhale slowly. "No. We were drugged. It didn't mean anything. We keep our mouths shut."

“And do we tell Marcus?”

Fuck. We’ve never kept a secret between us before. But, he’ll tell.
“No.”

Forrest whistles softly. “You must really want Ashunda.”

“Don’t you?” I bite back at him.

He’s quiet for a long minute. “I don’t know. I mean, sure, if she’s our only choice. She’s self-absorbed and not very bright, but beggars can’t be choosers.”

I glare straight ahead. “Do you have a point?”

Again he pauses, but the mischievous look vanishes from his face. “I like Medusa. There’s just something about her...”

“Her monstrous powers to manipulate men maybe?”

He laughs, unkindly. “How the hell did she manipulate us? She was drugged too, according to *you*.”

“But she got what she wanted. She’s under our skin. Making us question what we’re doing.”

Forrest shakes his head. “You’re ridiculous.”

“Am I? Because you’re talking like you’re ready to throw away a perfectly good female gargoyle, for what? A monster? A woman there’s no future with? You and I both know that the second we take her home, she’s done. So whatever the hell you’re thinking about, stop it.”

“For a guy who spent the night fucking a beautiful woman, you’re in a shitty mood.”

I flap my wings harder and separate myself from him. We’re going to be seeing Marcus soon. As much as I hate it, we need to get on the same page first. If he knows what happened, he’ll tell. And we can’t lose everything because of one night.

My thoughts turn to Marcus. I picture his dark hair and his harsh face. People say I’m an asshole... until they meet Marcus.

And then, I imagine him and Medusa.

Against my will, my fists clench. My heart’s racing. Once we reach our next destination, Marcus will be there. And I can’t let anything he does to our prisoner get to me. So why does just the thought of it turn my stomach?



WE STOP FLYING JUST before nightfall, near a barn on a hillside that looks like it has been empty for a long time. Forrest goes to a nearby city for food, and I wait and watch the sky until Harold and Medusa arrive.

I don't look at her. I can't look at her, but I see Harold.

He's already under her spell.

The little woman strides past me and into the barn without a word. Every muscle in my body feels tense. If this was another place and time, if we weren't monster hunters and her a monster, I'd ease this fight between us with a good fucking.

But instead I cross my arms over my chest and glare at Harold. "Took you long enough."

He shrugs. "We stopped."

"For what?"

"A snack. A rest. She's not accustomed to flying all day."

I glare. "And since when do we try to make our prisoners as comfortable as possible?"

He sighs, loudly. "She's not a man-eating minotaur. She's not a sea monster, crushing boats. She's just... a woman."

"That's what she fucking wants you to think!" I shout. "Do you think if she could turn us to stone, she wouldn't have done it by now? You've read the history books! She's left a wake of stone people behind her. She's a killer, hidden in a shapely body, I'll give you that. But she's a killer all the same, so pull your head out of your ass and remember it!"

To my shock, he advances on me. "You keep telling yourself that and maybe you'll start to think it's true! But I want you to think for one second what would have happened if she hadn't been okay with our night together. I want you to think about what it was like for her to wake up this morning and know she was drugged into fucking the three of us."

I swear, everything inside of me turns to ice. "Does... does she regret what happened?"

He stares at me. "She's a monster, right, Byron? So does it really matter to you?"

Harold follows her into the barn, knocking my shoulder roughly as he passes. I don't react. I'm rooted in place.

We are gargoyles. We protect humans. We protect people. We have never hurt a woman in all our long lives. The thought of it—sickens me.

I'm striding into the barn before I can think about what I'm doing. Harold is sitting on a barrel of hay next to her. They both stop talking at my approach. I stand in front of her, not knowing what I'm going to say before I say it.

"Do you feel like you were... taken advantage of last night?"

I can't see her gaze through her sunglasses in the shadows. "No, relax. I know what that feels like, and last night wasn't like that. We were all drugged. But I don't think any of us did something we didn't want to. Am I right?"

It's like I can finally breathe. "You're right."

But someone has hurt her like that? A protectiveness roars awake inside of me.

I grasp her arm gently and pull her into a standing position. I can sense her confusion. I don't think, I just pull her against me and wrap her in a hug.

She's stiff in my arms, but I stroke her hair anyway. Not realizing I was shaking until that moment.

"I'm fine," she says, softly against my chest.

Pull it together, Byron. I slowly pull back from her. And then, we're just staring at each other.

"Food's here!" Forrest shouts, walking into the barn with several bags.

The spell broken, we move away from each other. Everyone sits on the barrels of hay eating Chinese food. Forrest makes jokes. Medusa laughs, and Harold watches it all, looking happier than I've ever seen him before.

And I eat my food that tastes like regret. Knowing that we're using this woman. Knowing that we have one more dangerous task for her before we deliver her to her death.

What the fuck are we supposed to do when I can't even stand the idea of her hurting?

We are so screwed.



Chapter Thirteen

Forrest

We talked before we left the barn and agreed that neither Marcus nor the Elites would know about our night together. For some reason, it doesn't ease my tension. The idea of being free from our commitment to our people somehow felt right. I didn't want to use Medusa as an excuse, but I liked that it made everything feel easy.

Today, I get to fly with her to our next destination in Greece. I'm not looking forward to getting there, or seeing Marcus, not when I have her riding me in the air.

Twice I almost asked her if I could drop my pants and just start fucking her in mid-air. I think she'd enjoy it, and I know my swollen dick would too. But I think we got a free pass on our drugged night together. If we did it again, we'd have to accept that we broke the rules and deserved the consequences. Even though I wouldn't mind it one bit.

Her hand strokes the back of my neck. My gaze snaps back to her.

"You looked lost in thought," she says.

My eyes lock onto her mouth. "I was just remembering what it was like when you sucked my cock."

Her cheeks turn red. "And?"

"It was fucking amazing."

She shrugs. "Well, I've had lifetimes to learn just how to give it to a man the way he likes."

My dick swells uncomfortably in my pants. "I hope you didn't have too much practice, because I'd like to think mine is the first you've had."

She rubs against me, and I groan. "Is that right?"

I'm losing my god-damn mind. "Gargoyles are known for being a bit... possessive."

"Really?" And her brows rise above her glasses.

"Uh-huh." I'm breathing hard. "Some even call us jealous creatures with insatiable appetites for pussy."

She lets one of her hands drop from around my neck and slide down my chest. I stop breathing, watching as her small hand slips lower and lower until she's gripping me through my pants. "I'd say based on this, there's probably some truth to the rumors."

I thrust into her hand, and she grips me tighter. "You're driving me fucking crazy."

Very slowly, she starts to stroke my dick. "Are there any rules about someone getting you off?"

I'm in heaven... or maybe hell, I'm not sure which. "Not a one."

The next few minutes are spent with me trying to keep flying, trying not to send us spinning into the god damn ocean while she strokes me through my pants. When I finally come, my entire mind goes blank for a second, and then my vision becomes strangely bright.

"You really know what you're doing with a cock," I tell her, panting.

She leans up and bites my ear, her breath warm against my skin. "My turn."

When she takes my hand and slips it between us, I swear I've become her servant. Her worshipper. She is now my god damn goddess, and I'll fall on my knees in front of her any time she wants.

I touch her wet folds, and she moans into my ear.

Listening to her harsh breathing as I stroke her slowly, teasing her wetness, is enough to make me hard again. When she starts to grind against me, panting my name, I'm about to say fuck everything and tear my pants off. My fingers plunge into her, and then she begins to rock against them.

Her hands grip my shoulders tightly, and then she orgasms around my fingers. Riding me like a god damn horse. When she finally collapses against me, my fingers still buried inside her, I kiss the top of her head in absolute wonder

The gargoyle side of me is screaming that this woman now belongs to me, which makes no sense. I'm not a virgin. I've fucked a lot of women in my life.

But I've never felt this way before.

I reluctantly pull my fingers out of her hot pussy, smooth her dress down, and fly a little faster, realizing we've fallen far behind. "You're kind of amazing," I tell her.

She looks up, and her sun-kissed face looks flushed. “Thanks, you’re not bad yourself.”

The rest of our flight is spent with me holding her as closely as humanly possible, and trying to make her laugh. I’m careful not to tell her too much about the gargoyle way of life. I’m not completely nuts after all, but I also want to get to know her, and for her to get to know me.

I don’t have a clue why.

Maybe it’s because I know there’s something special about her. I also know our time together is limited.

When we finally reach Greece and set down in a park within the city, something has changed. Medusa seems uneasy.

“Where are we?” she asks.

“Greece.”

Her arms wrap around her chest again.

“You okay?” Gargoyles can’t help themselves. Our drive is to protect the innocent. And Medusa is screaming of innocence right now.

“I’m fine,” she says, but she won’t look in my direction. “But what are we doing here?”

Harold and Byron come from one part of the large park. I can sense Harold’s unease, but Byron is back to pretending like he’s a badass. His face is pulled into a frown, and his hands are clenched.

“Marcus will meet us there.” Byron doesn’t look at her. “But first we need to find some new clothes and try to blend in a little.”

I glance at Medusa. Her little dress is beautiful, but definitely a bit dirty, and she isn’t wearing shoes. And the rest of us? We don’t look much better.

“Probably a good idea. So, where to, boss?”

Byron looks like he’s trying really hard not to roll his eyes as he turns and leads us through the park. I shift, my skin turning tan, and my wings disappearing. Now all of us can be seen by the people we pass by in the park. And it’s definitely a good idea that we change our clothes, because we’re getting a lot of suspicious looks.

The three of us find whatever will fit us at the first clothing store. Jeans, t-shirts, and some basic jackets make us look a little less like we just spent a few days sleeping in barns and fields. Byron also purchases a leather backpack, which he shoves the fertility statue and cuffs into before slinging it onto his back. We take Medusa to a clothing shop next to ours.

She selects her clothes a little more carefully and slips into a changing room.

We're lounging around feeling out of place, with a nervous sales lady flittering around us. After living as long as all of us have, we easily slip into the local language, but even without the language-barrier three massive men make the woman nervous. *Or maybe it's the way Byron is glaring.*

I'm pretty sure the tightly-wound gargoyle is about to lose his shit when Medusa comes striding out of the dressing room. "This will work," she said, walking past us to the shoe area.

But the three of us? We can't stop staring. She looks fucking beautiful. The dark jeans she wears hugs her in all the right places, and her white tank-top is partially see-through. She wears a lacy white bra underneath, but the combo is strangely alluring. Because the way she acts... it's like she has no idea how hot she is.

She grabs a pair of socks and has the sales lady bring her a tiny pair of boots that somehow fit her small feet. At last, she stands up. "Ready, boys?"

Harold doesn't say a word. He goes to the cash-register and pays for her stuff, and then we're all hurrying out of the store.

I rush to catch up to her.

"You're looking good."

She smirks. "You're not so bad yourself."

I don't know why, but I take her hand. For a second her hand is stiff, but then she relaxes it and curls it around mine. I know it's stupid, but I like this feeling. Like we're a couple enjoying a day out together in the city.

"This place looks so different than I remember," she says softly.

I'm kind of surprised she didn't visit Greece more. She's Greek after all. Wouldn't she visit her hometown every so often?

"When were you here last?"

She stiffens. "More than two thousand years."

"Geez."

While we walk, she seems to grow more and more uneasy. Her steps grow slower. Every time she looks at an old building, she pauses for a really long time, her expression far away.

At last, Byron turns to glare back at us. "Come on, Marcus is going to be there soon, and we don't want to be late."

"Where are we going?" Medusa asks again, but the attitude has left her voice. She just sounds... worried.

Byron glares as we catch up to him. "No questions."

People glance our way and move around us. I almost tell Byron he's making a scene, but he seems to realize it. Turning, he continues walking.

We move up the hill now, heading for our destination. Medusa moves slower and slower until at last she stops completely. People move around us, but her gaze is panicked.

"Where are we going?" she repeats, and I'm right, she sounds scared.

Byron stops ahead of us and glares back. Before I can answer, he's storming towards us. "What the hell is the problem?"

"We're going to Athena's temple," I finally tell her.

Her hand pulls from mine, and she steps away from us. Her hands move up, gesturing as if to push away from us. "I won't go there."

"Why not?" I ask.

But Byron is quick to respond. "You'll go where we tell you to."

"I won't," she says, taking a step back.

A few people glance our way, moving around us on the sidewalk.

"Medusa," he hisses, almost under his breath.

And then, to our shock, she leaps off the sidewalk and races toward the trees that cover the sides of the hilltop that lead to the temple. It takes all of us a second too long to react, and then we're hurrying after her, careful not to alarm the humans. When we reach the safety of the trees, we bolt after her.

Byron is the first to reach her. He snags her around the waist, and they almost go tumbling to the ground. Suddenly, she's kicking and flailing in his arms.

We reach her. All of us exchange the same, *what the hell is going on?* Look.

"What's wrong?" Harold asks, and he sounds upset.

"I won't go there!" she shouts.

At last, something seems to click with Byron. He sits down, pulling her into his lap. She tries to hit him, but he catches her wrists. Their eyes meet, and to my surprise, Byron doesn't look mad, he looks confused.

"We need to take you there," he says, very slowly.

“Why?” she asks, and the word sounds torn from her throat.

“There’s something we need there. And you know men can’t enter her temple.”

“Tourists go there all the time!” she says, her words desperate.

“You know we aren’t visiting the ruins...” he explains quietly.

Most Gods and Goddesses can glamour their temples to look like the past. But when they want to, they also have places that they consider sacred or important that have more powerful magic. Their worshippers, and other Immortal creatures, can literally step into these places like stepping back in time. Everything is the way it was in the place’s glory days.

Often it’s this other world that the Gods and Goddesses reside in, sliding from the past to the present like time travelers. And yet, usually it’s just the place that’s enchanted. Outside of that, it’s only the present that rules.

And that’s where we must go. To Athena’s temple in the past.

There, she has another artifact, one that was stolen from Artemis, the goddess of children and childbirth. If we take it, it can give us extra protection to ensure the pregnancies we do have will result in healthy children.

The problem is that none of us can enter the temple. Only women can, since Athena is a virgin goddess. To walk into her temple as men would draw instant attention from her worshippers.

“We need you to go in and take something,” Byron says very slowly. “It’s in a hidden room behind her throne. The necklace hangs from a statue of her. It has a red stone. And, it’s very important.”

“I know the room. I know the necklace, but I won’t take it.”

“Medusa, this isn’t a request. It’s an order.” Byron speaks the words, but even I don’t believe them, because he’s busy pulling her shaking frame closer.

“I can’t,” she says, pressing her face into his chest.

Byron looks at both of us. “Marcus should already be here.”

I tense, having almost forgotten. For a minute, all I can picture is Marcus coming upon us and seeing us like this. Marcus is one of the best monster hunters of our kind. He’ll be disgusted by our affection for Medusa. He won’t understand why we’re here hugging her instead of forcing her to do our bidding.

“We should go,” Byron says, surprising all of us.

He rises as if in a hurry, and I realize what’s happening. He’s made a decision to get us out of here before Marcus sees Medusa. We want to understand why she’s so upset, and we won’t be able to do that with him here.

We don’t go back to the sidewalk. We walk through the trees on the hill, concealed from the humans.

Ahead of us, a man steps out of the shadows. We all freeze.

Marcus takes a step forward. His dark eyes, locking onto each of us in turn until he comes to Medusa.

“Good, you have it.” He strides forward, then pauses. “Where are its cuffs?”

“In my bag,” Byron says, his words tense.

Marcus moves around him and takes the cuffs out of the backpack. He grasps her hands, too harshly, and clamps them back on.

And Medusa must be very upset, because she doesn’t even react. She looks far away, lost somewhere we can’t reach her.

“Now,” Marcus says. “Does the monster know what it needs to do?”

“Her name’s Medusa,” I say, and I know I sound defensive.

His emotionless gaze flicks to me, then away. “Does it know what we want it to do?”

I see the muscles in Byron’s gaze clench. “She doesn’t wish to go into the temple.”

Marcus only hesitates a moment. “Since when do we give a fuck what monsters want?”

None of us answer.

The muscles in his jaw tighten. “Put her down.”

Very slowly, Byron obeys.

She stands in the middle of us, looking tiny and vulnerable. Her wrists are bound. Her muscles tense. And I’m glued to her, trying to understand the change in her.

“Monster, you will go into the temple and steal what we require,” Marcus says, looming over her.

“I won’t,” she tells him, her voice soft.

He murmurs the spell, and a second later she cries out, sinking to her knees.

Every muscle in my body is tense, ready to attack.

“Marcus...” I know the word sounds threatening, because it is. He sure as fuck better not hurt her again.

Marcus grabs the chain that links her cuffs and hauls her to her feet. “Do you think that hurt? With just a few words, I can have these magic cuffs tighten until they sever your hands. Is that what you want? Shall we see how much pain you can take until you obey me?”

She spits in his face.

He hits her, and before her body crumples to the floor, we’re on him.

Byron has him by the throat, pressing him against a tree. And I’ve got my fist drawn back, ready to beat him to a pulp. Harold has gone to Medusa, kneeling at her side.

No one breathes.

“Someone explain to me what the hell is going on!” Marcus demands. He’s still an alpha, even when he’s pinned against a tree by his throat.

I’m not sure Byron has even heard him. His entire chest is rising and falling rapidly, and the anger in his gaze terrifies even me.

I don’t drop my fist, but I answer. “Medusa isn’t the monster everyone says she is. She’s... a person. We know we need her, but she’s scared of the temple. We’re not going to send her without knowing why.”

Marcus laughs. “I knew I shouldn’t have sent you three without me. You’ve fallen for her shit so easily, it’s shocking.” His gaze is cruel as it sweeps over us. “I bet she’s got a tight pussy to have you all this wound up.”

I punch him. Hard.

It wasn’t a conscious decision. It was a reaction, a primal need to protect the woman in my care.

Gritted words I didn’t plan leave my lips. “Don’t talk about her like that.”

His eye already looks swollen as he focuses on me. “You hit me?” he sounds shocked.

“Damn right!” I say, my voice growing louder. “You aren’t an asshole. You’re just completely wrong. She isn’t a monster. She’s a woman. Think about that and ask yourself if you’re comfortable with what you’re saying.”

“What about the hundreds of people who she’s turned to stone over the years?” his words are quiet now, and I can tell he’s evaluating us.

None of us have a good answer.

“No one wants to hear the truth.”

I turn. Medusa has struggled into a sitting position. The entire side of her face is swelling. It looks so painful that everything inside of me twists. How the hell could Marcus hit a woman? How could he hit *her*?

“We want to hear the truth,” I tell her, and mean it.

Medusa curls her knees into her chest, and her eyes fill with tears. “I *am* a Monster. I *have* killed people.”

“There! See, I’m right!” But Marcus doesn’t sound satisfied, he’s staring at the crying woman.

Harold sits slowly beside her. “That doesn’t make sense. When we took you, you made an effort not to turn us into stone. If you’re some heartless killing machine, then why did you do that?”

Tears keep tracking down her cheeks. “Do you guys really not know?”

We all exchange a confused look.

She laughs, but the sound is filled with heartache. “You went to kill a monster without even knowing how I became this way.”

“We thought you were born this way...” I say, confused.

Her lips twist into a smirk that’s so at odds with her tears. “I was mortal. A worshipper of Athena in the very temple you guys are trying to drag me into.” She takes a ragged breath. “Until Poseidon saw me and decided he wanted me. So on the floor of Athena’s temple he... he... took me against my will.”

I’ve never wanted to kill a god before, but in that moment, I want to kill Poseidon. I’m blinded by a need to kill him. I know the bastard gods have a history of taking what they want, but I’ve never seen the effects of their actions before until now.

Medusa rubs at the tears on her face. “Athena was so outraged that we defiled her virgin temple that she cursed me. Any man who looked upon me would be turned to stone.” She shrugged. “There’s more to the sad little story of how a mortal woman turned into an immortal monster, like years spent on an isolated island alone. But I’ve covered the most important parts.”

“I’m so sorry,” Harold said. He tries to touch her, but she jerks away.

“It’s fine,” she says. “It’s literally been over two thousand years since I became this fucking monster. It doesn’t bother me, okay? I just can’t... I can’t go into her temple.”

Silence stretches between all of us. What are we to do? What can we say?

Of course we can't send Medusa into the place she was raped.

But we've also all realized something at the same time: Medusa isn't a monster. Not on any level.

She's just a woman cursed by the gods. So what do we do now?

Marcus pushes Byron's hand away. "I need to speak to the three of you." He looks at Medusa. "Stay here. If you try to run, you should know you'll never get those cuffs off."

She doesn't even look at him. She just buries her face into her knees.

The four of us slip away into the trees just a short distance away.

Marcus sighs. "All right. We need to talk."



Chapter Fourteen

M^{arcus}

Well, fuck me. There appears to be one monster in these woods, and for the first time in my life, I'm pretty sure it's me. Not the crying woman I hit.

I mean, she could be lying. She could be a *really* good liar. Most monsters are. But I've killed dozens of monsters in my lifetime, males and females, and I've never fallen for their tears or pleas before. I think I'm usually a really good judge of character, and this Medusa... nothing about her screams that she's a liar.

"Did she really purposely *not* turn you guys to stone?" I ask, crossing my arms over my chest.

Harold nods enthusiastically. "And Byron was threatening to... hurt her." He shoots Byron a look.

The other gargoyle looks like he's going to be sick.

There's more going on here. But I just don't have time to dive into everything this second.

"Fine, until we know what she is or isn't, we'll be a little more gentle." I reluctantly agree.

Forrest shoots me a dirty look. "And no more *hitting* her."

"Or using the cuffs to hurt her," Harold adds.

A second later, Byron says softly. "And we can't make her go into the temple."

I've never seen them like this before. It's like... like...

I look at each of them a little more carefully. "Are you guys in love with her?"

My question is met with silence, which says more than their words ever could.

My head feels light for a second. I'm their alpha. The four of us are meant to share a woman. Gargoyles choose their Brotherhood of Stone, knowing how few female gargoyles there are, and how hard it is for us to

breed. Not every brotherhood has an alpha, but I'm without a doubt theirs. And yet, I've never felt on the outskirts of our group before.

But right now I do.

They've fallen in love with a woman... a monster we're supposed to use and kill. And I've become their enemy. I'm the voice of reason telling them this is stupid, even if my words don't say that exactly.

I'm going to have to fix this. *After* we've accomplished what we came here to do.

"We still have to get into the temple," I tell them. "How do we expect to do that without her?"

"Force our way in," Byron says with a shrug.

I raise a brow. "So basically unleash a bunch of bloodshed in a goddess's temple? The goddess of war? Seems like a bad idea to me."

Byron gives me his stubborn-as-fuck look. "Well, we aren't sending her in there."

"Then tell me another solution that won't end in us all getting cursed or killed."

"I'll do it."

I whirl to see Medusa standing near us. She looks surprisingly small and vulnerable. And the gargoyle in me has an innate need to offer her my protection. But I don't. Not until I know who we're dealing with.

"You're not going in there," Byron says, and there's no room for argument when he speaks.

She draws herself up as tall as her tiny frame can manage. "I decide what I can handle, and I can handle it."

"Medusa," Harold's voice is gentle. "You just had a breakdown at the idea of it."

"I did not!" And there's some fire in her voice. "I just needed time to wrap my mind around it. You guys sprang it on me!"

"That was not just about being surprised," Forrest says. His tone is light, but his body language is screaming that he's upset.

She marches up to us. "So basically, you're all going to get yourself killed fighting in Athena's temple rather than have me deal with a little emotional baggage? You guys aren't being logical."

For some reason, her words hit me as strange. "You're our prisoner. If we all get ourselves killed, isn't that a good thing for you? Why are you volunteering to help us?"

She turns toward me. I wish I could see her eyes beneath the shadows of her sunglasses. But the shades of the tree are too much. “Didn’t anyone ever tell you not to look a gift horse in the mouth?”

“I like to know the reasons behind a person’s actions,” I tell her.

“I’m sure you would, asshole, but you’re not going to. So decide what you want to do.”

It’s strange how much nothing is going the way I planned. And I planned everything, down to the smallest detail. Each of us had a role to play in order to return in time to save our people. It was a risk assuming that a monster would help us inside this temple, but I’d had plans on how to force her to. Mostly they were plans involving torturing her until she obeyed.

But I didn’t plan on this place being so upsetting to her. I didn’t know that anyone would care about her feelings, and I never thought a monster would volunteer to help us.

Sending her in feels like a liability. In my mind, I ran through each scenario on how we could get the necklace, like sliding chess pieces into place. We had to trust her. It was the only way any of this would work. Even though I didn’t like it.

“Alright, we send her in.”

All three of the gargoyles speak at once, varying degrees of anger and shock.

I raise a hand. “She can do it. Trust her.”

That silences them for a moment, and then Byron says, very slowly, “What if she breaks down? What if she gets caught?”

We’d abandon her to the goddess’s wrath.

“We’ll cross that bridge if we reach it.”

None of them look happy, but Medusa gives a little nod and spins on her heel toward the temple. “Let’s get this done.”

We follow after her, my gaze sliding between my men and her. This woman, and their relationship, is a puzzle I haven’t yet figured out. But I will figure it out.

Mark my words.

And if she’s using them, playing us, I’ll kill her without hesitation.



Chapter Fifteen



M*edusa*

In my entire fucking life, I've never been the kind of person to back down from something. My reaction to this temple shocked me to my core. I'd known I'd avoided Greece because of the bad memories. I knew I avoided boats, islands, and the ocean because of my years spent in exile.

I didn't know that coming here would cause the memories to rush at me like that, pushing me into a full-blown panic attack.

And man am I embarrassed. It's been thousands of years since I was a human. It's been hundreds of years since I realized that I took no fault in what happened to me. It was the fucked-up system of the gods, a system where gods raped whomever they wanted, and goddesses punished the victims as if they held the blame.

I want to enter this stupid temple to show that I'm over what happened, to show that I'm stronger than they think. Stealing the necklace? I know how much Athena loves her little trophy. The idea of taking it from such a bitch makes me happier than anyone could imagine.

But still, the risk of getting caught and punished again would keep any sane person from entering the temple. The thing is, if these gargoyles decide to go in fighting, Athena will know instantly, and they'll be tortured and killed in ways they could never imagine.

The goddess of war is a cruel woman with an ego bigger than her temple.

I reach the sidewalk leading up to the temple and slip in with the tourists. A couple look at my chained hands, but no one says a word. I sense the gargoyles behind me, and I make sure my steps are measured. I don't need them to know the emotions this place boils up inside me.

My thoughts slip to Marcus. He has short hair, a military cut, and dark eyes. His body is far more muscular than the other gargoyles, but in a really controlled way. For some reason, I can picture him being the kind of person who plans every second of his life.

I instantly dislike him. People like that are control-freaks, and control-freaks and I don't get along.

There's no doubt he's hot, but... I look down at my cuffs and remember how hard they'd squeezed, so hard it felt like my hands were going to be torn from my wrists. A little blood darkened the edges of the metal, and I imagined my wrists were swollen and nasty looking.

And then there was my face...

This guy was an asshole, and I wondered how he would complicate things from here on out. I had no clue, but my gut told me that his presence wasn't good.

"Stop," Marcus growls in my ear, grabbing my elbow a little too roughly.

I jerk my arm to pull away from him, but he spins me around.

Instantly, we come face-to-face. His expression is neutral, but there's something in his eyes that makes me feel like I'm being judged.

I feel him touch my wrists, and then the handcuffs drop. He grabs them and hands them back to Byron to hide in his bag.

Harold gasps near me, and I look to see he's staring at my wrists.

Looking down, I frown. Yes, they're bruised and nasty looking. The edges of the cuffs cut my skin, but it isn't too terrible.

My mind goes back to the island I was kept on so long ago, of the many battles I fought there against heroes who wanted to make their name in the world by killing me. Everyone remembers the statues of warriors covering the island, but they weren't there to see me dragging myself across the ground after a fight, my gut torn open. They weren't there to see the many nights I wept, a battered pile of flesh after yet another fight I'd just barely survived.

No, in those days I was completely alone in exile. I suffered, *real* pain, not a scratch like this.

"Does it hurt?" Harold asked.

I jerk a little, coming back into the present.

"This is nothing," I laugh, but the sound is hollow.

Forrest is suddenly at my side, brushing my hair back from my face.

None of the guys speak for a long minute. It's strange, as if they don't want this Marcus to know they give a shit about me. That hurts.

I mean, I get it. I'm not a fucking moron. No one wants to say they might care a little about a worthless monster, but I don't know, they're big

guys. Gargoyles. I didn't think they'd cower so easily. Why does this Marcus guy have so much power over them? I'm still trying to figure it out.

"Do you have any questions before you go into the temple?" Marcus asks, his gaze searching my face.

I shrug. "Nope. But you fellas relax. Either I get your precious necklace, or I die. Either way is a win for you."

"Medusa—" Byron begins, but he doesn't finish his sentence.

I wink at him. "Don't worry about it. Just stay here with your boss."

He looks like he wants to say something, but I spin on my heel and head for the temple. *I can do this if I don't look directly at the entrance.* I try to forget about the gargoyles walking behind me. I try to forget about everything except getting in and out.

When we reach the top of the hill and the ruins of the temple, we separate from the crowd of visitors going in and out. We move to the side of the path, beneath the shade of a tree. I finally force myself to look up. At first, there's just the white ruins. I hear cars honking not far from us, and the smell of gasoline and food perfumes the air.

Closing my eyes, I will myself to see the glamour, to peek into the past. Nothing special happens. There's no explosion or a magical whoosh. Not that I expected one.

When I open my eyes, I'm standing in the past. The concrete sidewalks and tar roads are gone. A dirt path leads to the majestic building. The trees covering the path are overgrown compared to the modern era, when trees were taken down to make things nicer and neater.

Only a few travelers are walking to the temple, wearing either white togas, or the scratchy homespun clothes of the poor. All of them are carrying gifts for Athena. Some have small things in delicate packages, while others carry baskets on their heads or in their arms.

"We'll wait here," Marcus says.

I stiffen and turn.

My gargoyles seem completely out of place, tucked in the shadows near the temple. Harold and Forrest look nervous. Byron looks upset, while Marcus is simply watching.

It's now or never, bitch.

Turning away from them, I hold my head high as I start up the remainder of the hill. Just in front of me, the white temple looms. Its

massive pillars are polished, almost glowing in the afternoon sunlight. A priestess of the temple kneels on the marble ground, polishing and cleaning the steps and floor.

My belly clenches. *How many countless hours did I spend doing the same?*

Hold it together!

I step around the woman, seeing my leg peek out from the white toga that's glamoured my modern clothing. The priestess looks up and smiles at me. I give her a slight nod and keep going.

Inside, the air of the temple feels heavier, perfumed with the smell of leather and flowers. I freeze, my heart pounding. I've never forgotten that smell, and I'll always associate it with the temple of the Goddess of War.

Maybe this would be easier if I had.

I keep going, barely looking at the worshippers who stand near the columns leading into the main room. This building is not particularly beautiful in comparison to the massive temples that dominate this city, but this temple wasn't built as a thing of beauty. It was erected in a part of the city vulnerable to attacks. It's small and sturdy, with thick pillars that look more practical than decorative.

It was a place for people of the city to come to fight off attacks, and it's the perfect tribute to a Goddess of War.

When I finally allow my gaze to move to the wall where Athena has been etched in marble, I freeze. They make her look like a thing of beauty. My lip curls. She isn't the least bit beautiful. She's a bitch with power.

And that's all.

Offerings surround the massive carving. People kneel before it, their own offerings set before them. Priestesses move about them, touching people's heads, and speaking to them in low tones.

Fucking idiots. They spend their lives believing Athena gives a damn about them when she doesn't. She's a goddess. She doesn't care about anyone except herself.

I move away from them and watch cautiously as I move into the shadows and slip into the doorway. With sure steps, I weave through the little maze of halls and doors. Pressing on a brick, I grit my teeth as the wall slowly slides away. Moving into the darkness, I slide the door closed behind me and enter the room forbidden to all but Athena's priestesses.

Here, a massive golden statue of Athena dominates the room. The necklace hangs on her hand, with its beautiful blue gem, and its little carvings of babies.

I don't hesitate. I walk straight to it. I climb up her statue, bracing myself on her hips, boobs, and weapons, then snatch the necklace from her outstretched hands. Breathing hard, I leap down and clasp the necklace on, twisting it so that the only thing people can see is the golden chain around my throat.

Ignoring the butterflies in my belly, I leave the way I came. When I'm nearly to the main room, a priestess carrying a water pitcher nearly runs into me.

"You're not supposed to be back here!" the young woman says, her brows high in surprise.

I give her an innocent look. "I got turned around, such was my wonder at the great and mighty goddess."

She smiles. "It is no surprise. Even I feel overwhelmed by the power of our lady at times." She points to the doorway behind her. "Just that way and you'll find yourself back where you began."

"Thank you," I whisper, inclining my head to her.

I pass all the fucking stupid worshippers. I hurry down the middle of the path lined with pillars. In front of me I see the sunlight that illuminates the steps that mean my escape.

And Athena appears in front of me.

She wears a long robe, so white it hurts my eyes. The glow that surrounds her in gold might have once had me collapsing to my knees, overwhelmed by her power. But instead, I see past it, to the dark-haired woman with dark eyes. I see a woman with an average face and average beauty, at best.

"Medusa," she greets me, smiling. "It's been a long time."

I try to force a smile, to not think about the necklace that's poorly concealed at my throat. "Athena."

She laughs. "No bow? No respectful greeting? You've changed since you were a little human who thought the world of me."

"I changed after my rape and my curse." The anger in my voice surprises even me, and I realize I'm trembling in rage. "I loved you like a mother, and you—"

She laughs again and waves me away. “Oh yes, I forgot about my little curse. Look at those sunglasses—what a smart idea. I guess with them you’re no longer restricted to that island of yours.”

I shake my head, all logic flying out the window. “I will not stand here, not even with a fucking goddess, and pretend any of this is okay. You ruined my life! You ruined any chance I had at love, or children, or happiness.”

She raises a brow. “You were a priestess to a virgin goddess. You would have never had those things.”

“I could have been happy!” And now I’m shouting. “You punished me for something one of you gods did! I didn’t have a choice! You think I wanted that old, ugly bastard to pin me down? Do you think I wanted any of it?”

She raises her chin, and a fire comes to her eyes.

Oh fuck, I’ve screwed up. She’s going to curse me again. She’s going to make my life even worse.

Athena moves closer to me. She reaches out and touches the chain of the necklace at my throat, and she raises a brow. I can’t breathe. She’s going to kill me now. There’s nothing I can do to stop it.

She sighs. “Thousands of years ago we gods weren’t nearly as enlightened as we are today. Perhaps I—overreacted with your curse. Had such a great thing defiled my temple in these modern days, surely I would certainly make a different choice. So, Medusa, my child, I will forgive your tone and anger, and I will bestow upon you the gift that you long for.”

Tears fill my eyes. She’s finally going to take back this curse. I might not live forever, but I could live a good life. Then, I can actually die. Not just go on and on, suffering for eternity.

“Thank you,” I whisper.

She places a hand on my chest and it glows with her golden power.

“But if ever you enter my temple again, I’ll kill you. Enjoy your gift.” The golden glow runs over every inch of my flesh until the light is so blinding that I can see nothing but her face. “My necklace is yours.”

And then, everything goes black.



Chapter Sixteen

M^{edusa}

I collapse onto my knees in the street outside of the temple. The sounds of the modern world explode around me, but I can't seem to move. I can't seem to do anything but stare in front of me. She said... she said she'd right her wrong. I thought... I thought she'd make me normal again. That I'd no longer be a monster.

But she gave me this fucking necklace instead?

I can't... breathe. My chest feels tight, and tears blur my vision.

A necklace? A necklace I don't even want.

And she left me like this.

"Medusa?" Harold's voice cuts through the fog of my panic.

I turn and meet his gaze, gasping in breaths.

His expression hardens, and he sweeps me into his arms.

I know the others are around us as we walk back down the steep hill. But I can't look at them. I'm too busy sobbing, trying to breathe, and being swallowed by my grief.

When they take me into some kind of apartment, Harold asks me what I want.

"Take the necklace," I say.

Harold's face looms over me. "Medusa..."

"Take it," I gasp. Suddenly, I feel like it's choking me. I grasp at it with shaking fingers. "I can't breathe. Take it off! Take it off!"

Harold grasps the necklace and snaps it off my throat.

And I draw in a breath.

I struggle out of Harold's arms, and I move away from them. They're all staring at me like I'm nuts. And maybe I am.

Turning, I run from them, spot a bathroom, and race inside. I lock the door, flip on the shower and crumble into it. The water's cold, but I don't care. I just cry and cry.

If it hadn't been for the necklace, I might be human now.

I grasp my stupid glasses and toss them onto the shower floor, hating them with every fiber of my being. Drawing my knees up to my chest, I descend into a kind of sadness I haven't experienced in thousands of years. It reminds me of the day they cast me onto that island, alone and afraid.

Young and sheltered, I'd spent the time since I was a young girl serving in Athena's temple. I had never been alone. I had never slept outdoors, never made a fire. I looked around that god-forsaken place, and my heart broke. I felt... lost.

Like I do now.

And it's stupid. Nothing's changed. I was a monster yesterday, and I'm a monster today.

So why do I feel like everything's changed? Maybe because I faced something I've feared since I was turned into this *thing*. I saw Athena again.

But if I hadn't been stealing the necklace... if I'd just gone to face her... right now I'd be human.

I hope those fucking gargoyles understand what I gave up. I hope they know that shiny piece of shit stole my only hope at ever having a real life.

"But of course they don't. And of course they don't care."

Every muscle in my body tenses. I just faced down my demons. I risked my life. All for men who hold me as their prisoner. All for men who still can't promise me they won't kill me when my use to them is gone.

I don't know how long I sit in that shower before I turn it off. Stripping off my soaking clothes, I drop them into the bottom of the tub, pull on my putrid glasses, and wrap a towel around my body. When I go out into the tiny bedroom of the apartment, I see a white shirt has been laid on the bed, one that has *Greece* written on the front. I dry myself and put it on, then go out to face the gargoyles.

They ordered food. It's laid out on the table they all sit around, but no one is eating. When they spot me, all eyes are glued onto me.

"What?" I ask them, glad I sound angry and not heartbroken.

"Hungry?" Forrest asks.

I'm not, but I also know I haven't had a lot of proper meals lately, so I nod and take a seat. Harold silently makes a plate of food for me, and then we all eat.

Part of me wants to ask a lot of questions, but I'm also retreating inside myself. I know it's a defense mechanism. I just want to curl up on

the bed, and drink until I fall asleep. Maybe someday I'll get a therapist to help me with it. If I live that long.

We finish eating, and I stand up, intending to find a bed and drink myself to sleep. Just like I wanted.

"Just a moment," Marcus says, and his tone is a little less harsh.

My gaze meets his dark one, and I can feel him evaluating me. "You need something?"

"We need to talk," he says.

I want to tell him to go fuck himself, but instead I sit back down. "Make it quick."

He raises a brow, and I can sense anger bubbling beneath his surface. "You know what we are and what you are. That makes us enemies."

I try not to look at the other gargoyles. I know they won't defend me, and I shouldn't expect it. "I understand gargoyles see the world in black and white. People are either good or bad, but monsters are always bad. Nothing else matters."

He leans back in his chair and steeples his fingers in front of him. "And you think that's wrong?"

I smirk. "I know it's wrong, but I also know that after hundreds or thousands of years, you guys aren't going to change your tone because of one monster who doesn't seem to fit the bill."

"Did any of us say you don't fit the bill?"

Suddenly, I rise, my hands shaking. I go to the tiny kitchen and tear through the cabinets until I find a bottle of cheap vodka, half empty.

"Liquor isn't a good idea right now," Byron says, and there's a warning to his tone.

I glare at him behind my glasses and unscrew the top. "Liquor's always a good idea."

Taking several deep swigs, I don't stop until I feel the warmth and relaxation moving through me. Then, I pull myself up onto the countertop, so that I'm facing them, and drink more slowly.

My gargoyles look concerned. Marcus has his same annoying expression, like he's evaluating me.

"We need to know what happened in the temple."

I take another drink as my stomach clenches. "What's to tell? I got the necklace. Isn't that all you care about?"

A flash of hurt comes and goes on his face in an instant. "We need to know if we've angered the Gods. We need to know if anyone saw you."

Did anyone see me? *You fucking asshole.* "Yeah, *fucking* Athena *fucking* saw me. Did you think she wouldn't?" Someone draws in a surprised breath.

Any kindness I saw in Marcus' expression vanishes. "That's a bullshit lie."

My heart starts thumping, filling my ears. "Don't call me a liar."

"Marcus—" Harold begins, but the asshole cuts him off.

"She loves that fucking necklace. There's no way she'd let you leave with it."

I laugh, a dry, angry laugh. "Oh, she let me leave with it. The bitch."

"Monster..." Marcus begins, starting to stand.

Forrest stands too, putting a hand on his shoulder. "She's not a liar."

Marcus laughs. "You three actually believe a goddess let her steal from her without a punishment?"

"It was a punishment," I say, and now I know it's true.

All of their gazes fall on me.

"She realized she was wrong to curse me. And so, she agreed to give me the one thing I wanted more than anything." I feel tears sting my eyes. "She gave me that fucking piece of jewelry rather than end my curse."

I feel tears roll down my cheeks, and I grab the bottle of vodka and take another long sip, trying to stop the meltdown that I know is coming

Then, Forrest is there in front of me. He takes the bottle and sets it on the counter before he wraps me in his arms. "I'm so sorry."

I grab the fabric of his shirt, and bury my face into the material. I hate that they're seeing me weak, but I've never had someone to comfort me when I was sad. This feels so good. It doesn't matter that I'm not even sure these gargoyles like me or see me as a person, it's better than being alone.

"Alright," Marcus says. "We believe you."

"Fuck you," I mutter, the words choked by tears.

"Now, does anyone want to explain what happened between the four of you?"

I'm shocked when Byron speaks. "We slept with her."

I open my eyes at the sound of a chair scraping against tile.

"Is that a joke?" Marcus spits out.

Byron meets his gaze. "No."

Marcus rubs the thin layer of hair on his head and starts to pace. “So all of this is for nothing? We can’t take a mate. We can’t have a child.”

I huff out a breath, and feel the liquor really settle across my brain like a warm blanket. “We were all drugged with ambrosia. They didn’t break their vow. It wasn’t their choice. And don’t worry, I’m not going to tell anyone, so we can just pretend it never happened.”

“Pretend it never happened?” Marcus asks. “We can’t do that! And what’s more, ambrosia might hit us like drugs, but you four knew what you were doing.”

I open my mouth to defend them, but Byron answers instead. “Yeah, we did. And we don’t regret it. She’s beautiful, and unique, and we like her.”

Marcus launches into a rant, but I barely hear him. I lift my head from Forrest’s shoulder, and look at Byron. His expression is unreadable, but he watches me.

I’ll never figure that one out, so I turn back to Forrest. He smooths the wet hair back from my face and tucks it behind my ear. “Like you didn’t know.”

For a minute, I’m overwhelmed by him. He’s so handsome, with his deep green eyes and model-good-looks. That mouth, made for smiling and for kissing.

Maybe it’s the liquor. Maybe it’s the day from hell that I’ve had. The week from hell. But I reach up and pull him closer to me, catching his mouth with my own.

For a minute he holds himself stiffly, as if in shock, and then his mouth softens against mine, and our kiss deepens. His tongue moves into my mouth, and I moan and press myself harder against him.

I remember that I’m wearing nothing but a shirt, and not even my underwear protects me from him.

“What the hell are you doing?” Marcus shouts. “Have you lost all sense?”

He yanks Forrest back and I nearly topple off the counter.

Forrest has the good grace to look embarrassed. “There’s just something about her—“

“Maybe she has the power to seduce,” Marcus says, crossing his muscular arms over his chest. He looks at me as if I’m the devil.

I hate that I notice he's muscular. I hate that I see a tattoo sticking out from beneath his tight grey shirt, and that I have to curl my hand into my palm to keep myself from reaching out to touch it. Now that I'm thinking about it, my drunken mind can't think about anything else except touching that tattoo... and seeing what it is.

"Is that alright, Medusa?"

My head jerks up.

I feel my cheeks heat. Did they see me staring at Marcus? "What?"

Byron shakes his head and sighs loudly. "Marcus needs for us to meet with a nearby gargoyle. You'll be alone for a little while..."

Marcus huffs. "She won't be alone, I'll be here. And I wasn't exactly *asking* you three to obey my command."

Yet, as confident as he sounds, my gargoyles are staring at me, waiting for me to speak. "I'm a monster," I tell them, "I can handle one asshole."

Forrest and Harold head for the door, but Byron heads straight for me. He places his hands on either side of the counter, and his expression is serious. "Just obey him. He won't take your attitude quite as kindly as we do."

I lean forward and bite his bottom lip really gently.

He makes a sound that's a mixture of surprise and approval.

I pull away from him. "Also, did you really just imply you've been kind to me? I want the record to show you've been a grumpy jerk since the moment I met you."

He huffs angrily, but his gaze is locked onto my lips. "Just be good."

"Yes, sir," I say, with a salute.

For a minute I actually think Mr. Grumpy is going to laugh, or maybe kiss me, but he turns toward the balcony. They throw the doors open wide and one after another, the three shift into their gargoyle forms and leap into the night.

I stare at them, filled with a strange longing I don't understand.

I hear metal sliding against leather, and I turn to see that Marcus has pulled a dagger free. It looks sharp and deadly.

"Time for the two of us to talk."



Chapter Seventeen

M^{arcus}

I don't know how the fuck to approach the beautiful monster the others seem to have fallen in love with. All I know is that after tonight, I either need to get on board with this romance, and find my place in it, or I need to come up with a plan to kill her quickly when she's of no use to us.

The dagger feels cold in my hand as I move closer to her, and then come to stand just inches from her. Even on the counter, the tiny woman still looks small. Actually, she looks perfect, sitting at just the right height to be fucked.

Holy shit, where did that thought come from?

Maybe it's the fact that I know the others slept with her. It makes me feel... strange. We're supposed to share a woman. I'm on the outside of this, which hurts my pride in a way I never expected.

Or maybe it's because I watched her kissing Forrest. The way he touched her, the way she touched him—that was amazing. The sexual tension between them had filled the air like an intoxicating perfume.

While the others have struggled with their celibacy, I haven't. I simply willed myself not to think about women. Every time I imagined thrusting into a wet pussy, I did something else. I worked out. I practiced my fighting skills. I kept myself busy.

But suddenly, I have no desire to break down into pushups, or go for a long flight. That's not what I want. That's not what my body needs. Somehow, it seems ridiculous that I convinced myself otherwise.

There's the way she was looking at me—this beautiful creature finds me attractive too.

"You wanted something," she says, her voice husky.

Oh fuck, she even sounds horny. Like something out of a fantasy.

"I want to know why they have fallen under your spell." I search her face for an answer, and I can't see past her glasses. Tearing her glasses off, she gives a surprised gasp, and it's like a wall crumbles between us. Her eyes are... blue, clear and deep like the sacred waters of our lands. I didn't

expect that, and I didn't expect them to be so expressive. I no longer have to guess at her feelings,

"I need answers," I tell her.

One corner of her mouth quirks up. "Honestly, after how long they've gone without sex, I think they would've fallen for anyone who spread their legs for them. So don't worry, chief. I'm nothing special. When the time comes, they'll treat me like any other monster."

Something unexpected rises up inside of me. "They've resisted a lot of beautiful women over the years."

She shrugs. "Well, I guess all they needed was a monstrous freak."

The gargoyle within me hates the way she talks about herself. She looks so tiny, so unsure, but then she insults herself like she truly thinks that's all she's worth. Nothing.

"You aren't just a wet pussy to them." I realize that I mean the words as I say them.

She laughs. "Oh no, they had my mouth and my ass too."

I feel my cock harden, straining within my pants. I get the sudden perfect image of her mouth wrapped around my dick. Then I imagine the way it'd feel to part her ass and slide inside of her.

I'm breathing hard. "I know what you're trying to do."

She raises a brow. "What's that?"

"You're trying to turn me on."

Her gaze slides down, and mine does too. Suddenly, we're both looking at my erection.

"Wow," she mutters, "don't try to blame that python on me. That's all your doing."

Suddenly, I resheath my fucking dagger and grab the bottle of vodka next to her. I take a few swigs, trying to calm myself. I shouldn't be aroused by her acknowledgment of my erection.

When she pulls the bottle from my grasp, I can't stop staring at her.

She smirks at me. "Careful, big boy, not everyone has my tolerance for liquor."

When she puts the bottle to her own lips, I imagine it's my cock in her mouth instead. "You'd be surprised," I tell her.

I take it back from her and take a big drink, just to prove her wrong.

The liquor hits me like a wave, warm and comforting. I set the bottle down. *She's right. Maybe I should've gone slower.*

I lean a little closer to her. "Explain it."

"What?" she asks, licking her lips.

"What's so special about you? They were ready to fight me just to protect you. *Me*, their brother. They wouldn't even fight for a female gargoyle. And then there's Byron, watching you with him is like watching a miracle. He likes you. And he doesn't like anyone."

Her eyes widen in shock. "It isn't like that. It was one drug-induced fuck session."

"Liar," I whisper.

She shakes her head. "Trust me. No one has ever loved me. No one could. I'm a monster. I'm a dangerous creature who will only ever bring them misery. That's not just me throwing myself a pity party. That's literally what they've said." Her eyes fill with tears. "My ex said he cared about me, but not enough to die for me. That pretty much sums up my love-life."

I place my hands on either side of her on the counter, aroused by this complicated creature. "But you can't hurt us, little monster. Your stone-glare... it's nothing to us."

Her expression is weary. "But it doesn't change what you think of me."

"It doesn't?"

She nibbles her bottom lip and my erection strains harder. Unable to help myself, I lean forward and capture her lips.

For one minute she holds herself stiffly, but then she melts beneath me.

I groan, and my arms circle her back, pulling her closer.

I just need one quick kiss to see why the others are lost in her. That's all I need. And then, I'll pull back. I'll stop things before they get too far.

But the longer we kiss, the more my logical thoughts swim away. Our kiss deepens as we move against each other, teasing each other with our tongues, testing each other.

When she moans, and her hands slide around my neck, I pull her closer. Her legs wrap around my back, and then my erection is pressing against her pussy. My hands move down her back to grab her ass... which is exactly when I realize she isn't wearing underwear.

Something inside of me snaps.

I grasp the bottom of her shirt and toss it off.

Our kiss breaks, and she gasps my name.

I don't think. I just push her back, pull her legs over my shoulders, and press my mouth against her pussy. She gasps and arches her back. Her hands go into my hair, bringing me closer.

I lick my way deeper into her folds, then use my hands to part her wide. She moans and bucks against me, but I move slowly and carefully. It's been so long since I enjoyed the taste of a woman, so long since I felt one orgasming against me.

Every sound she makes spurs me on, makes my pants tighter and more uncomfortable. When I start to rub my mouth against her clit, she goes wild, and I reach for my pants, undoing the button. I pull down the zipper and pull my dick free, stroking myself as I lick her.

At last, she rises off of the counter. "Oh, fuck me, Marcus. Please, fuck me."

God, I love my women submissive, begging for my touch.

I rise from between her thighs and wrap her legs back around my back. She arches as I suck her nipples, stumbling toward the bedroom. We make it to the wall before she shifts slightly, and my tip slides into her wet folds.

Pressing her against the wall, everything inside of me tightens. I watch her beautiful face. Her expressive eyes. As I press inch by inch deeper into her. I enjoy the way her nails dig into my shoulders as she pants yes, yes, yes.

And it takes everything inside of me, every drop of willpower to keep from exploding inside of her. But I won't. I won't embarrass myself or come before she's enjoyed her pleasure.

I keep going until I'm balls deep inside of her.

Pausing there, my lips move from the hard peaks of her breasts and up to her neck. I suck every inch of her, leaving my marks. I claim this woman who now belongs to me. To us.

I begin to thrust in and out of her as the nerves along my shaft scream in pleasure. The intense feeling radiates through every sensitive inch of my flesh and fills my mind with nothing but her. Nothing but an awareness of my dick sliding in and out of her tight channel as she squeezes around me.

I'm aware of her legs tight around my back. Of her nails digging even deeper. Of her moving against me to take my thrusts harder and harder.

When her inner-muscles squeeze around me, a string of curses explodes from my lips, and then she's orgasming, bouncing wildly against

my dick like a creature in heat. Her pleasure does crazy things to me. I clench her tighter, thrust harder, and explode, filling her with my seed.

I move in and out of her, enjoying feeling myself spurting for several long seconds before our thrusting slows, and she crumbles against me. My entire body shakes as I hold her tighter and take us to the bed. I lay back, keeping myself inside her.

Her head rests against my heart in a way that's strangely intimate.

I find myself stroking her hair, strangely content. Perhaps it's just that I've finally spilled my seed after so many long years. But the thing is... I'm not sure. This woman, she surprises me.

I'm going to have to consider what all of this means. How it changes things.

But for now, I simply let my eyes close. I like the way it feels to have my dick still inside her tight pussy. I like her lying on top of me, her breath even and peaceful.

My breathing slowly matches hers and I slip into sleep, not even caring what the others will think when they come home to find us like this.

It's not like they can say a thing. They've already fallen under her spell.



Chapter Eighteen



B^{yron} I love the feeling of the wind sweeping around me, especially when my mind is so turbulent. I knew Marcus would be disappointed in me for my weakness. He's always seen me as his second-in-command. He trusts me to steer our brotherhood into making the right choices, into doing what was necessary for the survival of our people.

My mind goes to my father. The leader of our people. Suddenly, my heart starts to race faster. I push my wings harder, leaving Harold and Forrest behind.

Most gargoyles are created, not born, so families are made between those of us who become close. But my father was made by the same human as I was. He was placed on another corner of the clock tower in the little town we watched over.

The other gargoyles in our town were destroyed during the last war. They'd been asleep too long and unable to awaken at the screams of fear of their humans, but my father and I awoke. And when there was no one left to protect... we left. I went my own way in the world, searching for more of our kind.

And he created the sanctuary.

My father was a harsh man. Yes, he could be cruel at times, but without him, gargoyles would be extinct. Too many had lost themselves in their stone-flesh, never to awaken again. The few who remained survived because of him.

But, soon he would die.

I tense, soaring through clouds. I try so hard not to think about it. Emotions make us weak, make it hard to focus on the task at hand. So why was he all I could think about now?

Far below, I almost miss the meeting place. I swoop down to the ancient ruins and land lightly on the top. The bag on my shoulder suddenly feels too heavy, and I have to take a deep breath to keep myself calm.

Forrest and Harold land loudly behind me.

“They aren’t here yet,” Harold says, slightly surprised.

I shrug.

“I’m kind of glad, because I think we need to talk.” Forrest leans against the building, his expression troubled. “Once they have the statue and the necklace, we’ve done the most important tasks to help our people...”

Yes, the necklace and the statue is what we hope will save our people. But Medusa herself might be the only answer to saving my father, and the other Elites.

“It’s not enough,” I tell him, knowing exactly where his thoughts are going.

“The Elites have lived for a long time—“

“I won’t be responsible for sealing my father’s fate,” I tell him, a warning in my voice.

“But you’re okay with Medusa dying?”

My fists clench. “I didn’t say that.”

Harold puts his hands up, as if to stop our impending fight. “Who says it has to be one life or another?”

“They do!” Forrest and I say together, and then we glare.

Harold sighs and looks toward the moon, speaking in a practical tone that I despise. “If we don’t bring Medusa to the sanctuary, all the older gargoyles die. But then when her use is over, they’ll kill her.”

“Exactly what we just said.” I turn my glare onto him.

“But what if we negotiate for her life?” His words drop between us.

Forrest stands straighter. “You really think they’d negotiate for the life of a monster?”

“We can ask for a Blood Moon Judgment.”

I inhale sharply. My thoughts circle back to the last time one was called. “That still doesn’t guarantee her life.”

“We have three months before the Blood Moon. If they can’t hurt her in that time, they can get to know her... and just like us, they’ll see she isn’t dangerous.”

“It’s a risk,” Forrest says, his expression far away.

“And our entire brotherhood would have to agree to request it from the Elites.” I think of Marcus. “I doubt that will happen.”

Harold turns his light blue eyes onto me. He has a way of softening even the hardest heart. “We can convince them to see things our way. If

we're all on the same page."

I think back to the last Blood Moon Judgment. Blood Moons are rare, occurring about twice every three years. Requesting a Blood Moon Judgment is a risk. It angers the Elites and makes them less inclined to support the brotherhood that asks for it. The last request was made more than fifty years ago... and the brotherhood lost their judgment, their standing in the community, and eventually left their home altogether.

"So this plan rests on the belief that we can convince Marcus to side with us, put our brotherhood in jeopardy, and convince a group of old, angry gargoyles that Medusa isn't a danger to humanity. That's one sound plan."

Harold raises a brow at me. "Do you have a better idea?"

I don't, so I keep my mouth shut.

We spot the two gargoyles before they land. Max and Arthur are not nearly as large as we are. But they're twins, crafted from the same maker, and both have a good spirit.

Max shifts back into his human-form and grins at me.

I shift as he approaches. He grabs my hand and pulls me into a "bro-hug," as he likes to call it. "When I heard you guys were successful, I wasn't surprised. The others though... they were sure either Eros or Athena would have turned you into dust by now."

Forrest laughs as he hugs Arthur. "Please! We told those gods we were taking what we wanted, and they could go fuck themselves."

Arthur throws back his head full of shaggy, dark hair and laughs. "So you guys grabbed the stuff and ran?"

"Exactly," Forrest says, with a smirk.

"So where are they?" Max asks, and our smiles vanish.

I let my bag slide from my shoulders and carefully open the top. Harold helps me pull out the statue and the necklace.

Arthur whistles low. "*Damn!*"

Max takes the necklace gently from my hands and looks at the broken clasp. Briefly I remember tearing it from Medusa's neck, unable to stop myself when I saw her panic.

"How did it break?" Max asks.

Harold answers before I can. "Stealing from Gods is harder than you think."

Max's grey eyes lock onto us, and I can see he knows we aren't telling the truth, but he's a good guy. He'll keep it to himself. "I guess the necklace works, with or without the clasp."

Arthur takes the statue and pokes at the giant dick. "They must have carved this after seeing what I'm packing."

Forrest slaps him on the back and points at the figure. "No man, you're looking at his nose. *That* down there is his cock."

They're grinning like idiots, which calms my tension... at least a little. I forgot how nice it was to be around the others.

"So tell us about the monster," Max says. "Is Marcus able to keep her prisoner on his own?"

"I'm sure he's doing just fine," I say, dryly.

Max raises a brow and meets my gaze with an unspoken question in his eyes.

"Has she killed any humans on your mission?" Arthur asks, sounding excited.

Harold answers, his voice tense. "She isn't like that."

"Like what?" Arthur grins. "A killing monster?"

"Yeah." Harold's eyes narrow. "Did you know she wasn't even born a monster?"

I feel every muscle in my body tense. I don't feel like that's our story to tell.

"How so?" Max removes his bag and pulls out soft leather. He begins to very gently wrap the necklace.

"She was a human once. She used to serve in Athena's temple, but she was raped by Poseidon. Athena cursed her in punishment."

Max freezes in his task. Arthur's amusement at the statue flees. None of us can stomach the idea of a fragile human being hurt, but women? We have a particular weakness for them.

"So how did she go from a human, punished for being a victim, to being a killing-machine?" Max says, finishing wrapping the necklace and putting it in his bag.

"Who said she was a killing-machine?" Forrest sounds like he's trying to keep his voice light. "She's just a creature with an unfortunate ability."

Max stands and puts the bag on his back. "You guys aren't going rogue, are you?"

I grab him by the shirt and shove him backward. His lower back hits the edge of the building, and his top half hangs over the edge.

Forrest swears and grabs me by the shoulder. "Stop it!"

"Let him go!" Harold says.

Someone grabs me with surprising strength and yanks me and the little fucker back. But I don't let go of Max.

Arthur is suddenly peering at me, his expression thunderous. "Let go of my brother."

"He ever accuses us of going rogue again, and I'll break every bone in his fucking human body. Understand?"

"Got it." Max says the words, but there's rage in his eyes.

I release him and step back. Harold and Forrest are immediately between me and them.

Max kneels down and picks up the statue from where it was dropped in the fray. "Luckily it didn't get broken." There's an accusation in his words that I don't like.

"Next time you should choose your words with care," I growl at him.

Max's anger fades, and he cocks his head and looks at all of us. "I was joking. I've known you guys for too long to throw around an accusation like that. I know damn-well you aren't fucking monster-lovers. Just watch it—for a minute you sounded like you sympathized with a beast that's been turning humans to stone for thousands of years. If you arrive home talking like that, you might find yourselves turned to dust before you think."

My fists clench, and I take a step closer to him.

Forrest whirls to face them. "Thanks for the heads up."

Max wraps the little statue and puts it in his own bag. "We'll get these back as fast as we can fly. The ladies will appreciate it. The Elites already created a shrine where the women will lay and the magical artifacts will be near them, to offer them protection and help. You'll receive a hero's welcome when you return, bet on that."

"Thank you," Harold answers, and maybe they don't sense the tension in his words, but I do.

We stiffly give another bro-hug, and then shift back into gargoyles and take off into the sky. When they're little more than shapes against a moon-lit sky, I turn to Harold. "Still think they'll give Medusa a fair chance?"

Forrest shoots me a dirty look. “We can always choose the alternative—to let the old men die.”

I glare at him. “Or to let her be killed.”

But even when I speak the words, I know I can’t allow either death to occur. My soul could never recover from it. If we can convince Marcus, we’ll risk our lives and reputation with a Blood Moon Judgment.

How fucking wonderful...



Chapter Nineteen

H*arold*

I don't know what to do. Every moment of my day is consumed with thoughts of Medusa. Her laugh. Her smile. Her bravery, even when she's terrified.

For some reason, seeing her so haunted, so broken, completely shifted my world. With hurt women, I feel a need to protect them. To keep them safe.

With her, I want more than that. I want to kill a God for her. I imagine myself destroying Poseidon, piece-by-piece. I imagine myself ripping him to shreds, in the most painful way imaginable.

And then? I imagine myself returning to my sweet Medusa and keeping her safe forever. Holding her. Showing her that some men can be trusted. That some men know how to treat a woman.

The surge of emotions sweep me under, and all I can think about is the *after* then—the moment when I remain by her side forever. No matter how much I try to think about anything else, my mind keeps returning to her.

As we fly back to the city and away from our meeting place with the messengers, I realize something else. When I return, I'm going to make love to Medusa. Not because I'm drugged up, or horny, although I am, but because I've made a decision.

I am not just going to save this woman's life. I'm going to make her mine.

And I don't care what I have to do to make that happen.

The wind picks up, and I realize just how aroused the thought of her has made me. My erection strains uncomfortably inside my pants. My rebellious brain takes me back to our night in Eros' temple, when I fucked our sweet woman in every possible way.

There's something unimaginably incredible about being a big man fucking a tiny woman. It isn't just that every hole in her body is tight, squeezing my dick in protest. It's that I can bend her, move her, slip her between us with ease. It's that I can dominate every part of her.

Now I'm officially losing my mind. I need to take her, and I don't give a shit what the others think. The second I return, I'm parting her sweet ass and slipping right inside.

If she'll have me.

I feel my muscles tense. All along we've been thinking about dealing with the consequences of caring for a monster, of protecting a monster, of having sex with a monster. But what if we don't matter to her? What if it was just sex for her?

The idea makes my stomach twist and my fists clench. It's true—we haven't really treated her well. She's our prisoner, after all. We kidnapped her, we hurt her, and we forced her into a dangerous situation.

I wouldn't blame her if the second she got a chance, she ran as far and as fast from us as she could.

But I can't let that happen. Not when I feel this way about her. I need to show her that she matters to me, even if the others aren't yet on board.

The lights of the city come, and we soar over it all until we reach the balcony of the apartment. Then, we gently land, one at a time, and shift into our human-forms before going inside.

I'm surprised to find the apartment strangely quiet. Marcus is nowhere to be found, and nothing is disturbed. My heart races. Even gargoyles have enemies... perhaps they've found us here. Perhaps a monster came who was more powerful than Medusa and Marcus together, one they couldn't stop.

I move to the bedroom, and freeze.

Marcus and Medusa are together in bed, naked. She's lying on top of him. Her beautiful ass facing me. The kitchen lights highlight the curves of her body in a strangely intimate silhouette. "What the fuck?" Byron mutters beside me.

"Well, damn!" Forrest says.

And we all just sit and stare, unsure what to do or say. Marcus—our fearless leader—couldn't resist her either? Maybe we have more of a chance than I thought of convincing him of the Blood Moon Judgment.

I want to explore that thought more fully, but there's a naked Medusa in front of me.

"What should we do?" Byron asks.

I shrug out of my shirt. "I don't know about you two, but I'm going to see if they're ready for Round Two."

Forrest gives me a shocked look, but then he starts to undress too.

I slip into the room and stare. Marcus' cock is still firmly inside her pussy. I wonder what she'd think of her ass being filled by me?

Moving behind her on the bed, it shifts beneath my weight. I run a hand along her spine, stroking her back and hips. She sighs and wiggles on Marcus.

He mutters, "shit," and his eyes pop open.

He looks from me to the naked woman on top of him.

She lifts her head sleepily and glances back at me.

I hold my breath. What will she say?

"You going to stand there all day? Or put it in my ass?" she mumbles.

A shudder moves through my body. "Yes, ma'am."

But I know better than to plunge into a tight asshole. I want my little woman screaming in pleasure, not in shock.

Marcus seems to understand. He pushes the hair back from her face and pulls her down for a kiss. A little moan leaves her lips, and he curls his hands around her breasts.

I position myself behind her, but don't enter. I focus instead on touching her skin, her back, her hips. And then, I move her on top of Marcus, watching his dick slipping in and out. Getting more and more wet by her juices.

Grasping my dick, I slide myself in her wetness.

She's shifting and moaning, taking Marcus harder with each stroke.

When my pulse fills my ears, and my dick is coated in her juices, as well as my own precum, I part her ass. Slowly slipping inside is like the sweetest torture in this world. She grips me tightly, awakening my flesh. Pleasure ripples through me.

When I come to my hilt, a shiver moves through my body. *Keep your control*, I tell myself.

Forrest and Byron enter the room, naked and erect. They come to stand at her sides. I grasp her waist and pull her so that she's sitting on us. I have to adjust to move back to let her come down fully on top of my erection.

She makes a little sound of protest, and then their dicks are in her face.

Immediately, she grips them and begins to stroke. They each grab one of her breasts in a possessive manner. When Forrest flicks her nipple, she gasps and leans toward him. He swears as she takes him into her mouth. And my own arousal builds at the sight of her sucking him off.

Using her hips for leverage, I move Marcus and I in and out of her in a rhythm that's pure pleasure. When she lets Forrest's dick pop out of her mouth, she immediately turns to Byron's dick and takes him deeply.

Feeling myself inside her and watching her pleasure my brotherhood is like heaven.

When her inner-muscles start to tense, she begins to ride us. And holy fuck, I'm lost to her. She rides us in a frenzy of movement, and my brain can't process anything except her tight body wrapped around me.

When her head throws back, and she shouts a string of nonsense, I come, exploding into her tight ass. Forrest and Byron don't disappoint. Their cum shoots out, coating her breasts, and I feel Marcus coming seconds later.

We're all breathing hard. Trying to regain even an ounce of our brainpower.

She looks down at her chest. "Fuck boys, I've never enjoyed being painted, but that wasn't half bad. Now, who's going to clean me off?"

We all volunteer at once.

She laughs.

But Forrest is the one who scoops her up and takes her to the shower.

The three of us lay side-by-side on the bed.

"So you fucked her?" Byron asks, amusement in his voice.

Marcus sighs. "I couldn't help myself. It wasn't just her beauty. Or the fact that you three were falling in love with her—"

"There's just something about her." I finish.

Both men nod beside me.

"We've decided we can't kill her, or let them do it." Byron's voice is hesitant as he speaks.

Marcus doesn't respond for a long time. "So your plan is to run?"

"No," I interrupt. "We're going to request a Blood Moon Judgment."

He stiffens. "We won't win."

And I say the words I didn't realize until now. "If we lose, we fight our way out. We take her with us. We leave that world behind us."

Again, he's quiet for an uncomfortably long time. "And all of you are willing to accept the consequences of this decision."

"Yes."

"Then," he clears his throat. "That is exactly what we'll do. Either all of us survive or none of us do." His words have a finality I don't like. It's

as if he's weighed the possibility of us fighting dozens of gargoyles and escaping with a monster, and decided we won't win.

"Life is too short to be lonely," he says after a moment.

I stiffen, surprised. I didn't realize he was lonely.

"But tonight I think we work off twenty years of celibacy." There's a smile in his voice. "We can deal with our unlikely future tomorrow."

Even though our plan will anger our people, will have them calling us monster-lovers, and make them believe we've betrayed them, I smile. I've never looked forward to a night more than this one ever, not in thousands of years.



Chapter Twenty

M*edusa*

“My vagina hurts. And my ass. And my throat.”

Byron’s hands tighten around me as we fly through another thick cloud. “Sorry about that.” But he doesn’t sound too sorry.

He sounds a little proud of himself.

I snuggle closer against his chest. “I wasn’t complaining. If all my holes are going to hurt, I can’t think of a better reason for it.”

He laughs, a surprisingly husky sound.

I look up at him as I feel his erection against me. “How can you be horny? *Again?*”

I’m pretty sure the big gargoyle would be blushing, if he wasn’t stone. “It’s the wind.”

“Still sticking with that turbulence crap? I can’t decide if you’re brave or an idiot.”

He smirks down at me. “Has anyone ever told you just to stay quiet and be polite?”

“The ones that have got kneed in the groin.”

He shakes his head. “You are the most frustrating woman I’ve ever encountered.”

“You’re not the first to tell me that.”

“You talk all the time,” he says, but there’s humor in his tone.

I smile. “It’s probably because of my time in exile. When I got around people again, I just couldn’t stop myself.”

Something subtle changes in his demeanor. “You were exiled?”

Oops. That’s not exactly a sexy story.

“Boy, you guys really need to research your monsters more before you kidnap them. Haven’t you heard all about the stories of me on Horror Island? The island covered in statues of dead warriors?”

His hands pull me even closer. “I guess I knew about it. At least I knew warriors had been sent to kill you, and all but one of them had ended up dead.”

“Perseus,” I say his name softly. “He was the only warrior to ever escape my island alive.”

“Why did you let him live?” His tone is neutral, but I can sense tension behind his question.

“I never wanted to kill any of them. I was alone on my island, a young woman trying to survive after being raped and cursed. Men would sneak up on me, I’d turn, and they were dead. But Perseus was smart. He used a mirror to see me without getting himself turned to stone.”

“I remember that story. But didn’t it end with him cutting off your head?”

I smile, remembering those days as clearly as if they were yesterday, because they changed my life forever. “That’s what he told people to get them to leave me alone. Instead, he made my first pair of sunglasses. He stayed on the island with me for a while and taught me how to fight. He told me about the world, the Gods, and the monsters. He helped me to understand how I could survive in it, without ending up dead.” For some reason, tears form in my eyes. “He was also my first love.”

Byron stays silent for a long time, and I wonder what he’s thinking. “So what happened to him?”

I shouldn’t tell him. I’ve never told anyone this story before, but I do. “He was a king. He had responsibilities. He couldn’t just sneak off with a monster. There was a woman—Andromeda—we stumbled upon her. She had been offered as a sacrifice to a sea monster. I turned the beast into stone and saved her life. Perseus freed her. That gave him a chance at a real life.

So, I left. People worshipped him as a hero for killing the sea monster. They believed he used my severed head to kill it, and he married Andromeda. They lived a happy life until he died of old age.”

“You’re a better person than I am.”

I startled and glanced up at him. “And why’s that?”

“I could never let someone else end up with the woman I love.”

There was something strange about his tone. Something that made me uncomfortable. Maybe because the pathetic part of me was hoping he was talking about me.

Yup, I’m a loser.

“It was the right thing to do,” I told him. “Being with me was dangerous. And like every other man I’ve ever been with has said, just not

worth their lives.”

Byron snorts. “Sounds like you’ve dated a lot of cowardly bastards.”

“I’m *Medusa*,” I tell him, like he’s lost his mind.

He leans forward and brushes a light kiss against my lips. “I know.”

I snuggle against him, my mouth tingling pleasantly from his touch. There’s just no words for the way I feel right now... maybe content? I don’t know what tomorrow will bring, but I’m going to cherish this moment. If there’s anything I’ve learned in life, it’s that happiness is fleeting.

I’m not sure how long I sleep when I’m startled awake by Byron’s voice. “We’re here.”

Slowly sitting up, I see that Forrest, Harold, and Marcus have all closed in around us. I can sense their tension like something palpable.

“Where are we?” I ask, feeling nervous.

“Our home.”

I stare far below us. There’s nothing but a massive tangled forest. “That’s where you *live*?”

“Let’s go,” Marcus orders our group, not bothering to answer my question.

He goes first, follow by Forrest, then Byron and I, and Harold behind us. With each second that passes, I feel more and more uneasy.

And then, below us, I see something shimmering in the morning light. Like a massive translucent bubble surrounding hundreds and hundreds of acres of woods. We fly lower and lower, and I see a little opening in the bubble. We shoot through it, and I gasp.

Inside, the air is warmer, and everything is different. There’s a tropical feel to all the plants, and a crystal blue river flows through the entire enclosure and feeds into tiny pools with waterfalls. I spot houses built into the tops of the massive trees. Some are spread throughout the enclosure, but I see a collection of them all in one area, not far from the largest waterfall. There, perhaps a dozen little houses dot a clearing in the woods beneath the treehouses.

“What is this place?” I ask Byron, in awe.

“Our sanctuary. The home of the gargoyles. It’s a place protected from the outside world.”

“I love it,” I say, and I mean it.

He stiffens. “You do?”

“It’s beautiful.”

I can tell my compliment makes him happy, but the tension radiating through our group doesn't dissipate.

"Things are going to get worse for me, aren't they?" I ask.

He takes too long to answer. "We have a plan to protect you, but you'll need to trust us."

I look at the handsome gargoyle that holds me, and then my gaze scans over our group. All the men are watching me. *Do I trust them?*

"If you want to leave—" Forrest begins.

I guess I trust them more than anyone else I've met. "No, I can handle it."

But I'm pleased he even made the offer. Forrest might seem like all fun and games, but I can tell he's ready to kick ass when he has to. And right now he's got that look—like he wants to beat the shit out of someone for me.

Which is sweet.

"The prejudice against monsters runs deep here," Harold explains. "We're going to fight for you, but we want you to be prepared."

I laugh, trying to sound confident. "This isn't my first rodeo, boys. Everywhere I go someone wants me dead. Someone despises me. It'll be a walk in the park."

None of them look convinced.

"I'll trust you guys that you won't let me die, but you guys trust me that I can take what they throw at me, okay? We can't have brawls breaking out with you and your people because of the things they say or do. That won't help anyone."

Marcus raises a brow. "You're just going to take it?"

"You bet."

He does that annoying thing where I know he's analyzing me again. But then I remember our night together, and I realize he's not nearly as annoying as I first thought. He's just one of those guys who is wound so tight that when you get him in the bedroom, he snaps like a horny rubber band. I mean, hell, he was insane last night. I don't think I've ever heard a man talk that dirty to me... or say the f-word that much.

And it really turned me on.

Oh, and then there are his tattoos. The one on his arm was the most bad-ass looking pair of wings, and the rest of his chest was covered in even more.

Yeah, Marcus has a tight ass. But he's not as much of a tight ass as I first thought.

So, I wink at him. "Relax, I got this."

Byron holds me a little closer as we soar over the amazing jungle. I see tiny fairies drifting through the trees. Sparkling fish flip and dive in the waters of the river. The flowers seem to bend toward us as we fly past.

I realize for the first time what I didn't know before: this place is magical.

I wish I could stay here forever. Magic makes you feel different, full of hope and possibilities. Magic exists out in the real world, but places like this are rare... and they certainly aren't places I'm allowed inside of.

When we spot gargoyles ahead of us, I think they're going to fly out to greet us. Instead, they shoot away toward the village.

My happy feelings crumble and my nerves scream back to life. I told my gargoyles I could do this. So I need to. I will. I *have* to.

By the time we reach the village, there are dozens of gargoyles on the ground. We land not far from them, but my men don't move. They remain in place, still in their stone-forms.

"Welcome back," someone greets.

The man looks entirely human... but older than any human I can imagine. His wrinkles have wrinkles, and his eyes are so pale, I'm almost certain he's blind. His back is bent at an uncomfortable angle, and he inches toward us using a staff carved out of dark woods. When he nearly reaches us, he stops and cocks his head. His strange pale eyes fall onto me.

"Good, you got her!"

Murmurs rise up in the people behind him. Groups of gargoyles cluster around three very pregnant females, who look human. They stand as if warriors, protecting the women from me. But there's also curiosity in their expressions as they try to look around my men to see me.

"Bring her to the hall," the old man orders, then turns and starts right back the way he came.

We follow him slowly. My men say nothing. We pass the groups of gargoyles, and I can't help myself.

"Hey, I'm Medusa. I'll be your prisoner this morning!"

No one laughs.

"Tough crowd," I say.

A lovely woman with pale yellow hair meets my gaze.

“Is it tough to be surrounded by all this testosterone?”

She raises a brow, and her lip quirks, but she doesn’t answer me.

We shuffle to the largest building in the tiny town. It’s made out of stone, unlike the other ones, with moss covering nearly every inch of its walls and roof. The two big doors are thrown open, and I’m surprised by the slight chill that swallows us as we enter the darkness.

The old man reaches the room and struggles up the stairs of a dais, before seating himself on a simple throne. Three ancient people are seated to each side of him, three women, and three men. All of them watch our group with suspicion, as we come to stand before them.

“Let’s see her,” the old man orders.

Byron’s grip tightens around me for one second before he slowly puts me on the ground.

My legs tremble ever-so-slightly, which I’m sure has more to do with our long flight than my nerves. At least that’s what I tell myself.

“Why aren’t her hands bound?” the man says, and his angry words echo around us. “What’s to stop the monster from simply reaching up and removing her glasses, killing us all?”

I answer before the others can. “How about a thing called a moral-code? You know, the same thing that keeps your gargoyles from just snapping weak humans’ necks.”

There’s thunder in the man’s eyes. “Bind her hands.”

Marcus steps forward. “That’s not necessary. She’s agreed to help our cause.”

A woman speaks from beside the old man. “I’d hoped that Max and Arthur’s account of their interaction with you was incorrect, but it seems we do have cause for worry. The four of you are treating the monster as less a prisoner and more of a guest, which suggests she may have manipulated you into trusting her.”

Marcus crosses his big, muscular arms over his chest. “Only a fool would use excessive force with a willing prisoner.”

The older humans lean toward one another and begin to whisper. I don’t know what my gargoyles are thinking, but their actions are making me nervous.

At last, the oldest man’s gaze lands on Byron. “We can’t wait any longer. Each moment brings us closer to death.”

He nods and moves to my side. "Father, I understand. And Medusa is ready to help."

Father? This old man is his father? I didn't even know gargoyles had fathers... and this guy looks human. So how did that work?

"So, how do her powers work?" the old man asks.

I answer instead, hating to be talked about like I'm not here. "I remove my glasses, and any humans or weaker magical creatures are turned into stone. Pretty simple."

The old man glowers at me. "Can't you get her to shut up?"

My men stiffen, but say nothing.

"I'm sorry, I didn't realize you lacked basic manners." There's a bite to my words. "You'd think after helping you get Eros' statue and Athena's necklace, that you'd at least treat me like a person."

His mouth curls up in disgust. "I think somehow you've forgotten your place, so let me remind you. We are the protectors of mankind, hunters of monsters. And you are a disgusting creature the world would be better without. Helping us on our mission doesn't change that."

I open my mouth, but Byron cuts me off. "How do we want to do this?"

His father looks angry as he takes a deep breath. "I'll go first, so we can see if it even works."

"No," Byron says, his word final. "Someone else—"

"I won't ask my people to risk their lives if I'm not willing to." The old man stands. "I'll go first."

"Go first with what?" I ask.

For a second I think he won't answer me, but then the old man's gaze holds mine. "You're going to turn me into stone."

I can't breathe. No, I don't just go around turning people into stone. No matter how much of a jerk Byron's father is, I can't be responsible for taking his life. Not only does the idea turn my stomach, but this man is Byron's family. If I kill him, he'll never see me as anything but a monster.

"No," I refuse.

The old man smacks the end of his cane on the stone, the sound echoing loudly in the room. "You will do as I say."

My hands clench into fists. "I know what you think of me, but I won't have your death on my conscience."

A man laughs. My gaze goes to him. He has pepper-grey hair and yellow teeth. "And what about all the others you killed?"

I glare at him. “I don’t kill for fun. I’ve only done so when I didn’t have a choice.”

The man with the yellow teeth grins, and a chill runs down my spine. “Oh, how lovely. A monster with a moral code.”

Harold gently takes my arms and turns me to face him. “We’re not asking you to kill him. We’re asking you to try to save his life. Remember, most gargoyles are immune to your powers because we can turn into stone any time we want. But with these people, we think your powers can more than work on them, we think they could give them immortality.”

Save a life with my curse? *Yeah, right.* “I think you have my powers all wrong.”

He smiles, and there’s sadness in his stunning blue eyes. “Hear me out. Something’s happening with our older gargoyles—“

“She doesn’t need to know that!” Byron’s father shouts.

Harold continues, as if the old man never spoke. “They’re losing their stone-forms, and without them, they’re aging rapidly. Using your powers is our only chance at turning them back to stone and saving their lives. We think that if you turn them to stone, then it may re-activate their ability to change.”

Something chokes my throat. *I could use this curse to save people? It’s... it’s not possible.* “And what if it doesn’t work?” I whisper. “What if it just kills him?”

He pushes the hair back from my face. “If you don’t try, he’s got maybe weeks left.”

“A few weeks are better than nothing,” I tell him. “Trust me.”

I look back at the older humans, and sympathy blossoms within me. At one point they were immortal, frozen in time in healthy bodies. They must be terrified.

And maybe... maybe I can help them.

“Please,” Harold begs. “Just try. We wouldn’t have brought you here if we thought you’d fail.”

I take a deep breath. I can *try*. Maybe if I can save them, they’ll see me differently. My gargoyles won’t have to fight to justify why my life should be spared. These old gargoyles will see with their own eyes that I can do more than just kill.

“Okay, I’ll do it,” I say, squaring my shoulders.

“We weren’t giving you a choice,” Byron’s father says, his voice shaking. “You’re our prisoner, and you will do as we say.”

I stare at them, and something changes within me, something I know is a result of the four men at my side. Men who seem to care about me.

“And I want to make something clear to you. There are people who believe gargoyles are evil, that they are cursed beings. There are people who fear mermaids, sirens, witches, nymphs, demi-gods, gods, and every other magical being. But after all your lifetimes, you must have come to realize that there are good and bad in every group. That you can’t just decide an entire species is bad. So, yes, I’m a monster. Yes, you hunt my kind. But I want you to know here and now that not all of us are bad. I’m helping you today, not because I fear you. Because believe me, you’re not the first group to kidnap me. I’ve endured prisons. I’ve endured torture. I’ve endured things that none of you could ever imagine. And if I didn’t want to help you, nothing you could do would force me to.”

The man with the yellow teeth sneered. “Nice speech, monster.”

A few of the old people laughed. I can feel the tension in my gargoyles.

“I just had to say it,” I say with a shrug. “But I know empathy can’t be taught, so it is what it is. I’ll try to save your life, and you guys go right on hating me. I’m sure it’s easier that way for all of you.”

“Let’s get on with it,” Byron’s father says, but there’s something unreadable in his expression.

The older man stands. He seems unsteady on his feet. Byron sprints forward and moves to take his arm. His father pulls away, then shakily steps down the stairs on his own. Byron hovers behind him, his expression concerned.

I watch them, and something twists in my chest. Byron loves his father. Of course he does. But it was hard to see it under his tough exterior. Now, however, as he hovers behind him, I see it.

I don’t know if any bored Gods are watching us now, but I pray they save this angry gargoyle’s life.

Do you truly pray? The unfamiliar voice echoes in my head. The power of a God humming in each word.

Someone is listening. Someone is watching.

I haven’t prayed to the Gods since I was exiled, since I still believed in something. But I slowly sink to my knees, and clasp my hands in front of me, bowing my head.

Yes, I pray. I pray that I have the power to save these gargoyles. To do something good with my curse.

I wait for a long minute on my knees, my eyes squeezed shut. But there's nothing. No voice. No response.

Regret makes my heart clench. The words I thought I heard... they must have been a trick of my mind, the desperate hope of someone who was terrified, someone who finally found people who could see the good in her. Someone who knew that if she killed this man, four handsome men would never see her the same again.

When I open my eyes, I'm surprised to feel a tear flowing down my cheek.

A curious request of a monster. The voice comes again, but this time it sounds amused.

I don't move for a long second, waiting to see what more he'll say, but the voice is silent. Then I realize the God I've prayed to could just as easily be here to watch me kill this gargoyle as he is to help me save him. Fucking Gods.

I brush the tear away and climb to my feet. Which is the first time I realize that the entire room is silent, that every eye is on me.

No one knows what to make of my prayer. I can see it in their faces. But hell, I don't know what to make of it either.

Byron's father stands in front of a massive window made of different colored glass. It makes up an image of a gargoyle on top of a building, staring down at a city with a sunset behind him.

The old man stands alone. Byron is back by my side.

And the Elites are to our side.

My legs shake as I take a deep breath and move closer to him. He watches me warily, and when I'm just a few feet from him, I pause.

"What's your name?"

He looks hesitant. "Elite Edgar."

I smile. "Here's what I need you to do, Edgar. I need you to put all your energy into hoping this works, because I'm scared. And I need one of us to be brave."

His eyes widen in surprise. "All right."

I take another deep breath and reach for glasses, but freeze. Looking behind me, I search out Byron. "Is there anything you want to say?"

He opens his mouth and then closes it. "No, because this is going to go just the way we plan. My father and I can talk afterwards."

His faith in me is like a warm hug. "Thanks," I say, and the word is barely a whisper.

He nods, his gaze holding mine.

I turn back around. "Ready?"

The old man looks pale, but nods.

And... I slide my glasses off.



Chapter Twenty-One

M^{edusa}

Edgar turns to stone, but not the way others have before. It starts in his face as his expression freezes into one of fear. His pupils fade as his skin turns grey. It moves over his throat, shoulders, chest and arms. I watch the stone as it moves over him like a virus.

Horror steals my breath. I've killed him. I've failed. This man is not a gargoyle. He's just... another dead man turned to stone by a monster

When the stone spreads down his legs, and I know all the life has drained from him, I collapse onto my knees. "No," I whisper.

Tears fill my eyes, and I pull my glasses back on. I'm weeping, and I feel stupid. Why did I hope for anything other than what's happened before?

My gargoyles are suddenly kneeling around me. Marcus pulls me into his lap, and I cry harder.

"I killed him," I say, and then my gaze meets Byron's. "I'm so sorry!"

He reaches out and takes my face into his hands. There's so much pain in his expression. Pain I caused. "It wasn't your fault. You warned us. We made you try."

"It didn't work," the yellow-toothed human says, and his voice is filled with regret.

"We're doomed," another of the men say.

A woman starts to cry. And then, one of the women points behind us, to Edgar. "Wait..."

Every muscle in my body tenses, and I turn back around. Cracks have formed in the statue of Edgar. The sound of stone breaking fills the air, and suddenly, the stone explodes off of him. A gargoyle stretches out of the mess of broken stone, like a creature that has shed its skin. His large wings flutter, and he roars so loudly the ceiling shakes.

Then, his wings slowly fold onto his back, and for the first time I see his resemblance to Byron. It's uncanny. He still looks older than his son, but more like a wise father, rather than an old man.

“It worked,” he says simply. “Our way of life is saved.”

My men hug me. People are laughing.

“Now, for the others,” he tells me.

This time when I stand and move to the older people, I don’t feel scared. They move to stand in front of their simple thrones and look at me. I’m overwhelmed by the hope in their eyes. I’m not their killer...I’m their savior.

I’ve never felt like this before. Wanted. Needed. Important.

“Ready?” I ask them.

They nod, smile, and say their confirmations.

I smirk. “Get ready for your hot gargoyle bods.”

Pulling my glasses down, it’s the first time in my life that I feel joy as I watch the six people turn to stone. Byron’s father, and my gargoyles, move to my side, as I slip my glasses back on. The older people are all frozen in place, all the color of stone.

“You’ve saved their lives,” Forrest says.

He wraps an arm around my shoulders, squeezes, and pulls me to his side. I’m so happy. There are just no words. Is it really possible that I have a greater purpose in this world? That I can be of use?

When the stone begins to crack and crumble from the people, there are suddenly six younger, healthy-looking gargoyles, stretching their wings and roaring in triumph. A few shoot into the air and circle the inside of the building, before landing once more.

A sense of celebration fills the room.

Edgar gives his son an awkward side-hug. “I knew we could count on you to save us.”

Byron shakes his head. “It wasn’t us. It was *her*.”

The pleasure drains from his face. He steps away from us and seats himself back on his throne. His change of demeanor shoots through the room, and the other Elites follow suit, sitting back in their own chairs.

“Now, about this monster—“ he begins.

“She just saved all your lives!” Forrest says.

“Yes, she did. But that doesn’t change what she is.”

“Are you fucking kidding me?” he shouts.

“Watch your tone!” One of the Elites snaps back.

Edgar leans back in his throne, and his gaze levels with mine. “You have spent a lifetime killing and wreaking havoc on mankind. The

punishment for your crimes is death.”

My throat closes. I knew this was coming. Why did I think my actions might change their plans? Might change the way they saw me? I feel light-headed.

“You can’t do this,” Forrest says.

“Monster lover,” the man with the yellow teeth shouts.

Forrest leaps forward, but I catch his arm. He looks between me and the elder, his gaze wild.

“Don’t,” I tell him.

“He can’t talk about you like that,” he presses, and every muscle in his body is tense.

“We talked about this,” I say. My gargoyles can’t fight an entire village of gargoyles, and I won’t have their deaths on my hands. “I can handle this.”

“You can handle what? Your death?” he shouts at me.

I give him a sad smile and touch his face. “I’ve got this.”

Marcus pulls Forrest back, and his gaze slides to the gargoyles. He gathers himself and stands before them. When he finally speaks, his voice is deep and solemn. “We request a Blood Moon Judgment.”

A few of the Elites gasp.

“Marcus—“ Edgar begins.

“We request a Blood Moon Judgment,” Marcus repeats, a challenge in his voice.

Edgar looks to his son. “This is madness. If you do this, you’ll lose. Not just the judgment, but your standing in this community. You will be forever seen as monster lovers. You will never be sent to hunt one down again. You’ll never be allowed to take a woman, or have a child. You’ll be outcasts within your own community.”

My heart races. “Guys—“

“We’ve made our decision,” Byron tells them.

His father closes his eyes. “Very well.” Then, he opens his eyes and raises his voice. “The monster will be imprisoned until the Blood Moon. On that date, your brotherhood will be given an opportunity to present your reasons for sparing her life. If you lose, you give up everything, and she still dies.”

“No,” I say out loud. “They won’t change their minds. Don’t do this. I’ve lived a long time. I can—“

“It’s done, and we don’t regret it.” Forrest takes my face and tilts me up to look at him. “Do you understand? This is our choice, our fight. You’ve done everything we’ve asked, and more. You’ve done enough.”

“I can’t let you—“

“The choice has been made,” Marcus says. And when I look at him, I’m surprised to see admiration in his gaze.

“Take her to the prison,” Edgar orders.

Two gargoyles stand from the dais, and they move beside me. The yellow-toothed man reaches for me.

Byron springs forward and growls low in his throat. “Take her there. But don’t touch her.”

The man drops his hand, and Forrest releases me. I move between the two strange gargoyles, and we walk toward the door. I can’t believe I’m willingly allowing myself to be imprisoned. It goes against every instinct within me, but I can’t walk away. They told me to trust them. If this is the only way we can be together, then so be it.

When the end comes, if we lose, at least I’ll die with their love.

That’s something I never imagined having.

I look back at them one last time. All four men look like they want to chase after me, like they want to hold me in their arms.

My heart squeezes. The doors open, and I step out into the sunlight.



Chapter Twenty-Two

E^{dgar}

There were so many ways that I imagined this day going, but I never thought that in saving my life, I'd condemn my son's. He has fallen in love with a monster. His standing in our community is gone. Not only has he lost his honor, but he has lost the faith of all of us.

How could he make such a dire mistake?

"They will need to be watched," Galena speaks softly to my side.

It's just the two of us in the throne room now, me and Galena, my most trusted advisor. I sent the others away after a time. Their excitement about returning to their old bodies, combined with their disgust at our gargoyles, was too much. I couldn't think.

"Agreed," I tell her, even though it makes my chest ache in a strange way.

My son and his most trusted friends must now be watched. We don't have faith that they won't try to free the monster.

Somehow, I've failed him.

Galena takes my hand in hers in a way that feels almost practical. "I can't imagine what you must be feeling."

No, she cannot.

"But this Medusa..." she begins.

I know what she's going to say. I replay the events since the monster appeared before us. It does not make sense. She is unlike any monster we've encountered before.

Her kind are tricky, vile creatures who are capable of doing anything to survive.

But—and I swear to the gods that I will not voice these thoughts to anyone—she seemed so genuine. Even in my stone-form, I saw her cry when she thought I was dead. I could *feel* her sadness and regret.

"What do you know of her?"

Galena is quiet for a long time. "Very little. Until recent events, I believed her dead."

We'd received communication from a detective in The Special Unit until in her city. He'd informed us of her killings, and the need for the city to be rid of her. The revelation had been a blessing to us, and we hoped for a chance to save our lives. We had told Peter we would take care of it.

We had sent the team we felt best suited for extracting her and retrieving the artifacts.

"Each pregnancy takes longer to achieve," Galena begins, and I already know where she's going. "If the artifacts do not help significantly, we're doomed. These three babes may be the last of our kind. And with us turning human in our old age... our people will simply cease to exist."

"Unless the babes are female."

She sighed. "We haven't had a single female child in three generations."

"And so what are you saying?"

"Perhaps we should not kill this Medusa. Perhaps we should simply keep her indefinitely as a prisoner, so that she may renew us each time we turn to stone."

"No."

She releases my hand. "How many times have you said that the survival of our people trumps all else?"

"If we stop having babies... if we need the help of a monster to remain immortal... I would sooner let our people die out. We would have no hope at new babes, at any kind of a future, except one that hinged on a monster's abilities."

"Edgar, be reasonable."

I clench the handles of my chair. "The decision has been made."

She doesn't understand. The three females will give birth very soon. If there is not a girl among them, our fate is likely sealed. That's even if the babes survive. It took ten years for these pregnancies to take root. The last three pregnancies resulted in one early miscarriage, one stillborn child, and one healthy boy.

I pray every day that we have three healthy babes this time and that the magic of the statue and the necklace will give us what we need to continue as a people. But I've calculated our odds... and they don't look good. I believe this is the end of us.

We have been renewed. For how long, I don't know. But truly, all we needed was to know the sex of the children. My only purpose for

continuing to live was to see if our people have any hope at all.

If we don't, we should allow ourselves to grow old, to become human, and to die. There's no reason to stretch it out and to fight against the inevitable.

Even if this Medusa bothers me on a level I don't understand, she's still a monster. Eventual death is preferable to relying on an enemy to save us.

So, we shall see.

"Do you think they love her?" Galena asks.

I stiffen, and remember their faces. "Perhaps."

"Then, we should do all we can to keep them from her. To remind them of their true loyalty—to us."

I nod. "If we keep them from her, I fear their patience will come to an end, and we'll be forced to do something that we'll regret. But we can make it hard for them. We can do everything we can to distance them from her."

"Perhaps reminding them of Ashunda will help. Seeing that soon she will be free to choose them, as I know she wishes to do."

They'll know she'd never choose them now.

"We can try."

But as I stare blankly into space, I know a few things. No matter how this ends, I will lose my son. You cannot kill the woman your child loves, no matter that she's evil, without his hatred consuming him.

I just hope that in three months, on the night of the blood moon, they will have come to their senses.

Because one way or another, blood will be shed that night.



Chapter Twenty-Three

One week before the blood moon...
Forrest

“Please, just let me see her! Even if it’s only for a minute!” I know I’m begging, but it’s been one month since they allowed us to visit Medusa, and I’m desperate.

I’m going to lose my mind if I don’t see her soon, if I don’t know she’s safe.

Arthur looks uncomfortable. He knows why I’ve come now. The typical guards are assholes who’ve ignored our pleas. But Arthur is covering for them, now that their female is in labor, and he has a kind heart. He and I are friends.

“I’m not supposed to...” he says, but there’s something in his voice that I don’t like.

“Is she okay?” I ask.

He avoids my gaze. “She’s a monster, and a prisoner.”

“That’s not what I asked.”

After a minute, he sighs, and his grip on the handle of his sword loosens. “The others wouldn’t want you to know, but the guards even feel sorry for her. For a while, they’d come in and play cards with her. She’d tell them stories. I think... I think they even liked her. But things started to change about a month ago.”

My heart races. “Change how?”

He looks uneasy. “She stopped eating. She’s been... sick. Throwing up a lot. She gets paler and thinner. The others didn’t tell you, but they’ve requested that the Elites give her time outdoors. They have requested that she be allowed to see Galena in hopes of healing, but each time, they’ve been denied. The guards didn’t want to do anything to risk their female’s health or their standing in the community, for their child’s benefit. But I think they were glad to let me take over.”

I feel sick. “Why?”

He runs a hand through his dark hair. "Because they knew I couldn't see a female like that and do nothing."

"What have you done?" I ask, a little hope blooming in my chest.

His gaze holds mine. "It's not what I've done. It's what I'm going to do."

I frown, but before I can ask, he continues.

"This evening, just before the sunsets, I'm going to walk the perimeter. The guards within the prison will be taking a break to eat, and I'll be the only one here. The others are busy helping the new moms."

Two of the gargoyles had given birth to healthy sons. And the third was laboring. No one could remember ever having this many babies in the village, and everyone was scattering to care for them.

The Elites had sent our brotherhood on every errand under the sun, to care for the babies' needs. We have retrieved every supply imaginable from neighboring cities, and even though we knew they were trying to distract us, we did as we were told. We've just recently returned.

"What are you saying?" I ask, even though I know.

He holds my gaze. "You'll only have a few minutes with her. You'll need to get in and out without being caught. And if they find you, my name stays out of it." He looks troubled. "Try to get her to eat. Maybe it's just sadness. Maybe you can lift her spirits, before she wastes away."

I can't help the fear that sweeps me under. How ill is Medusa? And what could be wrong with her? Immortals rarely got sick. But the fact that even the others are concerned makes me uneasy.

"At sunset," I tell him.

He nods.

I clasp his arm, and he clasps mine.

"For what it's worth," he continues. "I was angry when I learned that you guys had fallen for her. I felt betrayed. But after spending time with her, I get it. And so do the others. I still think you'll lose the blood moon judgment, but I think a few of us plan to speak on her behalf. Even a few of the female gargoyles have spoken with her, since she has more knowledge of babies than they do, and... I think they may even see her as a friend."

I'm surprised by everything he says. It sounds as if we were the only ones restricted from seeing her.

I leave, flying as quickly as I can to our home. It's further from the village, in a massive tree near one of the smaller waterfalls. I land outside the door, and open it. I'm angry as hell, but I also have hope for the first time in months.

The others are waiting for me. They look up as I enter. Harold stops cooking over our little stove and Marcus and Byron stop sharpening their swords at the table.

"They didn't let you," Marcus sounds angry.

"Of course they didn't," Byron sneers. "I don't give a fuck anymore, I'm going to see her."

"One more week," Harold presses. "We just need to be patient for one more week. If we can show that we can obey the rules, that she hasn't turned us against them—"

"They'll still kill her." Byron sheaths his sword and places it on the table, his head bowed.

We're all being tortured without her. It's been three months of absolute hell. The few times we saw her... made us realize how much that we loved her. After being apart, we know how much we need her. She's the only female for us.

We've already decided that if they rule against her on the Blood Moon Judgment, we will fight. Even if it was to the death.

I take a deep breath. "We can see her tonight, if we want."

Harold freezes. "What do you mean?"

"Arthur will be the only guard for a little while. He said that we can sneak in and out to see her."

"Thank the Gods," Marcus mumbles.

Everyone looks relieved, which is why I hate what I have to say next.

"There's something else." The air changes. "She's sick."

They look at me like I'm stupid.

"Sick how?" Byron asks, really slowly.

"Arthur said she hasn't been eating. And that's she's lost weight... and she's been throwing up."

Something dark moves over Byron's face. "For how long?"

"About a month. He said the guards have been worried enough about her that they asked the Elites to allow Galena to look at her."

"And my father said no." He rises very slowly from his chair. "So, our female has been alone in a prison cell, throwing up, and not eating, and no

one thought to tell us? No one would even permit a visit from the healer?"

I nod, holding my breath.

He turns, paces for a moment, and then goes to the wall and begins to punch the wood until it splinters. When he draws his arm back again, Marcus catches it. Byron's knuckles are bloody when he whirls to face our leader.

"I'm going to kill them."

Marcus looks between his injured hand and his face. "No, we're going to save her. If she's in as bad of condition as they say, we're going to save her tonight."

Some of the anger drains from Byron's face. Marcus pulls him into a hug, and they clench each other tightly for a long moment.

"She's going to be okay." Harold removes the sharpened swords from the table, placing them on the weapons shelf. Then, he places bowls on the table and ladles out the stew. "She's immortal. And like she says, she's survived a lot. She can survive this too."

Byron pulls out of Marcus' hug and stares at all of us. "But she shouldn't have to. Having four gargoyles to protect her should mean that she's safe, and loved, not suffering alone. It kills me that this is all our fault! She did nothing to deserve this!"

And that's it... the reason we can barely function, the reason none of us can laugh without her. That's the reason we barely eat, and we've withdrawn from our people.

She is ours to protect, and we're failing her.

Something no gargoyle should ever have to endure.

"Sunset isn't far away," I tell them. "We should eat and gather our weapons."

They nod, and the chairs scrape against the wooden floor as we settle at the table. But all we do is stir our stew, and no one talks. We are all thinking the same thing. Not far from us, the little woman who holds our heart doesn't eat. How can we?



Chapter Twenty-Four

M^{arcus}

We stand at the edge of our village, watching the sun. We've heard the announcement. Ashundra has given birth to a boy, and everyone believes that we're to thank for the three healthy babies. Everyone believes that the necklace and the statue have brought this good fortune. The women have taken turns wearing the necklace since we brought it, and they all rest frequently in the room set aside for the statue. But for our efforts, everyone thinks we would have lost at least one babe.

It's strange to both be celebrated by our people and abhorred by them. They claim to be confused by our love for Medusa, and yet, I've seen it in their faces. I, unlike my brothers, have kept careful tabs on everything that's been going on. No, I didn't know she was sick, but I did know the other gargoyles have been visiting her.

At first when I listened cautiously into conversations, they spoke of her with disgust and disdain, but their tones have changed, and I know why. They can only spend so much time with her before they know she isn't what they've been told.

I just pray it's enough to turn the minds of the Elites during the judgment.

"It's time," Byron says.

I observe two guards leaving the prisons, toward the main building, where dinner is being served. We wait until the doors close behind them. The streets are strangely quiet, with everyone either caring for the new mothers, or eating in the great hall.

It's now or never, I think, and I take a deep breath.

I hope and pray that Medusa isn't as sick as Arthur described her.

We try to move casually through the village, but our steps are fast. When we come to the bars that cover the door of the prisons, Arthur is there on the other side. He unlocks the door and then he hands me the keys. "In and out," he says.

I nod. "Thank you."

He remains in place, so that anyone who might walk by will see him there, guarding everything as if nothing is amiss.

We unlock two more gates before we come to the cells. Hers is on the end. The slightest light from the little windows near the roof of each cell allows the red glow of the sunset to light our way.

We hurry to her prison, and I pause as I reach it, searching for her. And then, I spot her. She's lying on her bed. She's curled around her stomach, one hand hanging off the bed. Her skin is pale and her face is sunken as if starved.

Something inside of me screams in terror. She looks dead. I logically know she's not, but she looks that way. My hands shake as I put the key in the lock and turn it.

"Holy shit," Forrest whispers in horror beside me.

As soon as I get the door open, we all spring inside.

I gather her in my arms beneath her thin blanket. And I'm terrified by how light she feels.

"Medusa?" I whisper.

Her eyes are open, but she's staring off without seeing.

"How the fuck did this happen?" Byron sounds like he's about to lose it again.

There's no time for panic or fear. This is worse than I ever imagined. I thought we could obey the rules and have a chance at the Blood Moon Judgment, but there might not be anything left of her to save by then.

I hate the idea that we must betray Arthur, but we do. We need to get her to Galena, no matter what the consequences are. We need to find out what has an immortal this sick.

"We've got you," Harold whispers, smoothing her hair back from her face.

She doesn't react.

I stand, and my brotherhood immediately flanks me. Their swords make the slightest whisper of noise as they unsheathe them.

We move past the empty prison cells and open one door after another.

When Arthur turns around, he doesn't look surprised.

I stiffen. How are we going to hurt him?

"Just make it look good," he tells us.

Then, he turns his back to us.

Byron moves behind him, and hits him on the back of the head with the hilt of his sword. Arthur drops to the floor, and we pull him to the side. Now, no one will believe he helped us. His standing in the community will be safe.

Thank the Gods for Arthur.

We open the last door and start across the village. Galena's house is at the edge, near the water. It's also on the ground, luckily for us.

We hope that she has returned home from helping with Ashundra's birthing.

Halfway to her house, we hear a door open and the explosion of conversation. We freeze. My gaze goes to the door of the dining hall. Two gargoyles are walking, chatting with each other. They look up, then do a double take and stare at us.

Fuck.

"They're escaping with the prisoner!" One of them shouts.

He races back into the dining hall, and we turn and rise into the air, shooting across the village to Galena's house. Behind us, more shouts fill the air. Galena's house grows closer and closer. We just need to reach it and bar the door. Then, we can buy her enough time to help Medusa.

We hear the gargoyles pursuing us and can sense them in the air, not far behind. Without slowing, Byron crashes into Galena's door, and I shoot inside. My gaze sweeps from the fire, to her shelves of medical supplies, and healing bed in the center of the room. The healer? She's nowhere to be found.

Fuck.

I turn back around, stepping outside where Harold and Forrest guard the door. "She's not here."

Tension sings through them as a dozen gargoyles land in front of us.

"Move," Byron orders them.

Benjamin, leader of the guards, pulls his sword from the sheath on his back, and the other gargoyles follow suit. "Give us the monster. Don't be fools."

"She needs to see the healer," Harold says, his tone desperate. "She's sick."

Benjamin wrinkles his nose. "Are you really willing to die for her?"

Our answer comes as one. "Yes."

The guards leap forward, and I step back, pulling Medusa out of harm's way. Forrest, Byron, and Harold clash swords with them. Their movements are that of well-trained warriors, as they keep the overwhelming number of enemies at bay. Even when swords strike their flesh, leaving behind marks in their stone-forms, they don't hesitate.

The sounds of battle fill the sanctuary. Birds lift from the trees, and the glow of the fairies change from golden to red. As the sky darkens, the sounds of war take over.

Suddenly, someone shouts. "Stop!"

The guards freeze and move back.

My men are breathing hard, standing in front of me to protect my precious burden.

Byron's father pushes through his warriors, and his gaze burns as it falls on us. "What is the meaning of this?"

"She's sick!" Byron shouts. "And you left her in there dying—"

"Her kind can't die from illness," he says, and there's no kindness in his voice. "She might suffer, but—"

"Fucking asshole!" he shouts. "Since when do we allow women in our care to suffer?"

More gargoyles have appeared in the doorways of the buildings. Some fly down, landing not far behind the guards. The entire village must be out. I see Galena emerge from the birthing room, cleaning her hands on a towel. The two females, with small infants, leave other buildings, staring curiously as their men gather around them.

"She is not a woman! She's a monster!" Elder Edgar shouts back at his son.

Harold's soft voice comes, but this time it seems to ring all around us. "Is she really the monster here? This *woman* risked her life to get that statue. This woman faced her own demons—her own memories of being brutally raped—to steal the necklace, from a goddess no less. And who, even knowing that coming here might result in her death, came to help us. She went willingly to our prisons. In return, we left her sick and suffering. She's not the monster here. We are."

Edgar steps forward. "Do you all truly believe that we'll change everything we think of monsters because you fell in love with one? Monsters kill humans. We hunt them. Nothing has changed."

I don't know what comes over me, but I push past the others. "I know how easy it is to see things as black and white. Hell, my life was easier when I did." Despite myself, I look down at her. "And then, I met her. She was born human and cursed by the Gods for being a victim of their cruelty. She actively chooses not to kill, even though it's within her power to do so. I know it'd be easier to just lump her in with the creatures we've killed, but we can't. Not in good conscience."

"She's not going anywhere," Edgar says, but his tone isn't so confident.

"We just want her to get help, that's all."

Galena steps through the crowd. "Bring her inside."

Edgar grabs her shoulder. "You can't be serious!"

She rolls her eyes. "Look at her. She's hardly dangerous! And besides, I owe her one."

Tension continues between all of us as Galena leads me into the house and tells me to lay her on the bed.

I do.

"Now," she says. "Get out."

I shake my head. What if Galena hurts her?

She meets my gaze. "You have my word she'll be safe, but your brotherhood is on the edge of something dangerous. You're their alpha. Go out there and buy me enough time to figure out what's going on."

My head spins, and I feel fear unlike anything I've felt before as I look down at my Medusa's sunken, pale face. I walk back, stumble out the door, and it closes at my back.

Taking several deep breaths, I pull my sword free and go to stand with my brotherhood. We face down the people we called friends, people that we considered our family.

Some of them regard us with anger, some with interest, and others—with pity. But I don't care. I don't care about anything, as long as she's safe.

Time ticks away. Crying babies are taken back inside. The air grows colder and the moon rises. And still, the warriors face off with us and the Elites gather. Waiting.

And then, Galena steps out of her home.

The light from her fire illuminates all of us.

We look back her, holding our breath, hoping that Medusa will be safe.

“Well,” she says, very slowly. “I’ve found the cause of her mysterious illness.”

We hold our breath.

“She’s pregnant.”

The air whooshes out of us. My brain freezes.

“She’s about three months along, and given the size of the child, I have no doubt it’s a gargoyle.” Steel laces her voice. “If she is not treated with the utmost care, if she’s not fed according to her cravings, if she’s not given sunlight and happiness, the child will die, along with the mother. The fetus is taking everything within her, consuming what it needs. And it’s still not enough.”

The news that our woman is carrying our child wrecks me. Hope rushes through me at the same time as absolute horror at what our people have done to her.

We have to see her, to touch her and hold her. The fact that she’s sick and dying is enough to destroy us, or give us a new reason for living.

But we can’t go, not until we’re sure they won’t simply rush us and kill her.

We turn to the Elites, waiting.

I don’t think they’ve ever looked more uncertain and shocked in all the time I’ve known them.

“She’s still a monster,” Gary says, his yellow-teeth clenching together.

“Are you fucking kidding us?” It’s Arthur. He’s holding a rag to his bleeding head. “A gargoyle child is the most precious to our people. There should be no question what happens now. The woman joins our people, and her baby is cared for by us, just like any of our children.”

“She’s a monster!” Gary repeats.

The females have returned outside. They stride forward, clutching their sons to their chests. Everyone goes silent.

They come to stand in front of us and turn to face the Elites.

Ashundra speaks for them. “You’ll hurt her over our dead bodies.”

Another woman glares. “Idiot men.”

The third female places one hand on her hip, and her gaze slides over all of them. “Attacking a *pregnant* woman? You should be ashamed!”

Their words shock everyone. We’re breathing hard. My hand grows sweaty on the hilt of my sword. *Will they listen with the females on our side?*

Arthur and Max push through the crowd and come to stand beside the women.

Max speaks, his voice carrying. “Many of you have met Medusa, spoken to her. You know what she did for us. You also know her curse has no impact on us. Where do you stand? With her and her child—with Marcus, Harold, Byron, and Forrest’s child—or with your hatred of monsters?”

The head of the guards sheathes his sword. “I won’t kill a pregnant woman.”

The other guards follow suit.

We stare at the Elites.

Edgar finally speaks. “For now, she’s granted sanctuary. While she’s pregnant. After that, we’ll discuss her fate.”

We feel relief unlike anything we’ve felt before.

Arthur grabs my shoulder. “Congrats. You’re dads!”

We... we *are* dads. We have a tiny baby inside our woman. Inside our sick woman.

And they *will* survive. No matter the cost to ourselves.



Chapter Twenty-Five

Six months later...
Medusa

“Seriously, guys. I can’t eat any more.” I look down at our little table. There’s a half-eaten chocolate cake, ribs, mashed potatoes, pickles, a cherry pie, and salmon.

My big belly is bursting, and still, they’re trying to feed me more.

“Just another bite,” Harold pleads, holding up a fork full of pie.

I sigh, and eat it, just to make him feel better.

His entire face lights up, and I almost laugh. It isn’t hard making them happy nowadays.

“I’m getting fat,” I tell them, swallowing the pie.

Byron scowls. “You are *not* getting fat. You’re getting healthy.”

“I was healthy twenty pounds ago,” I say, and mean it.

Ever since I left the prisons, and they moved me into their home, I’ve been doing better. Instead of eating that nauseating crap they fed me at every meal, my gargoyles literally race out to get whatever I crave.

At first I couldn’t walk, but they carried me around the forest. They helped me bathe months’ worth of grime off my body and hair. They took me to visit the fairies, and to play with the magic fish. They’ve catered to my every whim—without comment or complaint.

I got stronger. I could walk again. I could eat more and more.

Now, I know I’m out-of-the-woods, and yet they continue to baby me.

“Guys, I’m huge. I haven’t been able to see my feet in weeks.”

Byron huffs. “That’s because our baby is growing big and strong.” He kneels down beside me, and places his head on my belly. After a second, he looks up, his expression *very* sincere. “The baby wants more food.”

I laugh and punch him playfully. “You stop that right now! I’m twice the size of the other women when they were pregnant! The last thing I need to do is to keep eating. This baby is already massive!”

All my men are grinning. Harold goes right back to fussing with the baby crib he built, making sure it’s securely next to our bed for the

millionth time.

“It’s perfect,” I tell him, laughing.

He blushes. “The baby should be here any day. I just want everything to be perfect for him or her.”

I look at their home. It looks like a baby store threw up in it. “I think we’re good.”

Forrest walks by me and places a kiss on my cheek. “Just let him fuss, or he’ll go back to driving us all crazy with those damn baby books.”

“What?” he frowns at us. “We need to know not just what to do during the birthing, but when the baby is actually here. I bought a new book about gentle parenting, and I really like the idea of teaching instead of punishing —“

Forrest groans.

But Harold just continues. “No time outs, just time ins. We would talk them through challenges, rather than disciplining them.”

“I can’t listen to this anymore!” Forrest shouts, throwing his hands up.

I start to laugh again, but it cuts off as a pain shoots through my belly.

“Are you all right?” Marcus asks, and then they’re all at my side.

Marcus adjusts Athena’s massive necklace around my throat, then places a hand on my belly, as if he can tell what’s going on inside of me.

“I’m okay,” I tell them. “You just stuffed me. I think a walk might help.”

They immediately gather around me to push my big pregnant body out of my chair.

It’s almost comical, but the truth is, I’m not feeling great.

Forrest carries me down from the treehouse, and we go to the village. The five of us walk together, slowly. I keep hoping the pain will fade, but it only seems to intensify.

Damn that last bite of pie. I knew that I shouldn’t have eaten it.

The female gargoyles sit on blankets in a grassy area in town. Two of the babes crawl around, while their protective fathers stand guard.

They wave when they spot us. We make our way towards them.

“How are the babies?” I ask, trying not to wince.

Ashundra answers without hesitation. “Still not sleeping through the night. Probably because *certain* men rock him every time he makes the slightest noise.”

I force a smile. “Damn those jerks.”

She laughs.

“Well,” Elery says. “Little Shawn is now getting into everything, so they’ve locked down our house with every baby proofing thing imaginable. I can’t even use the toilet without going through a dozen locks.”

Autumn grins and looks at my men. “Little Mitchell is the same way. You just wait!”

“We can’t wait!” Harold exclaims, making everybody laugh.

I hiss as pain shoots down through my belly.

“More pain?” Byron asks. “We should see the healer.”

“I’m fine,” I reassure him. “Just too much pie... and cake.”

Ashundra rises and comes over to study me. “You don’t look so good. Go check with Galena, just in case.”

I start to protest.

“What if the baby’s in trouble?” Harold asks.

His question makes me stiffen. They don’t need to remind me how many things can still go wrong.

“Maybe we will go see her... just to be sure,” I say.

We make our way to Galena’s. Even though they all want to carry me, I refuse. I can still walk, despite what they think. A few male gargoyles nod at me as I pass, but their gazes linger a little too long. I swear to god, my men all tense, like they’re about ready for an actual beat down.

I laugh. “You guys realize I’m like twenty months pregnant, right?”

“Nine months,” Harold says, sounding angry.

“But if they think you’ll be up for grabs once the baby comes, they’re going to get to experience my foot in their asses,” Forrest says, his voice loud enough for them to hear.

Geez. Like I’m a catch. Even here.

But I kind of like seeing them jealous.

“I thought that’s how things work here,” I say, innocently.

Byron sweeps me into his arms, and his mouth crushes mine.

I sigh and soften beneath his kiss. My lady-bits heat up, and I wonder if we have time to stop at our place for a quickie before we see Galena.

He pulls back from our kiss, leaving me panting. “Sorry, but we’ve decided we’re not going to share. You got a problem with that?”

I tap my chin, as if thinking. “Maybe you guys can remind me of your skills later, and I’ll—shit,” I gasp as another pain hits me.

It lasts for too long before I can draw in a breath.

For the first time, I'm a little worried. What if something *is* wrong?

They race to Galena's house and push open the door.

She looks at us and rolls her eyes. "Again? Boys, I'm sure she's fine."

"Actually, there might be something wrong this time," I say, trying not to sound nervous.

Her annoyance vanishes. All the many times they've dragged me in here, I've never been worried.

"Lay her on the table."

They do, and she shoos them out of the room while she checks me.

At last, she smooths down my dress, and her gaze meets mine. "It looks like you're going into labor."

My breath hitches. "Now?"

She nods. "It could last awhile. But you're far enough along that I'm not worried."

When she calls my men back in, they hover around me, looking anxious and excited.

Fearful, I lay back and wrap my arms around my chest. "I'm not ready for this."

Harold pushes my hair back from my face. "It's going to be okay."

I shake my head.

Byron squeezes my knee. "You can handle anything. And besides, we're right here. You'll be okay. Just trust us."

I look at each of my men, scared out of my mind. I guess if this is going to happen, at least I have them.

But I don't tell them the truth—I've never been more terrified of anything in my life.



Chapter Twenty-Six

E*dgar*

I look up as Galena enters the great hall. All of us are seated, waiting to hear the news. Did the child survive the birthing? If it did not, we'll have to move quickly to kill her before her men can interfere. If the child survived? We'll have to decide how long to let her live.

She comes to stand in front of us. I'm a bit surprised she hasn't joined us on her throne. "It's done."

My pulse races. "Out with it. Did the child live or die? Is It normal? Dangerous like its mother?"

She stands taller. "Medusa had twins."

Elizabeth gasps and stands. "Twins? That's... impossible."

"Did they survive?" I ask, my gaze snapping back to Galena.

She nods. "Both children survived... and both children are female."

A chill moves down my spine, and every hair stands up on my body.

"It's a blessing from the Gods," Elizabeth whispers, covering her mouth.

Heath turns to me. "This changes everything."

I meet his gaze. "It changes nothing."

The atmosphere of the room is charged, like the moment before lightning strikes.

Heath speaks to me slowly, as if I'm a fool. "We cannot breed with Gods, or demi-gods, humans, or magical creatures—but apparently, we can with monsters. And their new genes might give us the daughters we need to survive as a species."

I feel my muscles stiffen. Is that what they all believe? They all think that we should welcome monsters into our homes with open arms? Can they really be so stupid? This was one... unexpected pregnancy that changes nothing.

Galena clears her throat, and I turn back to her. "Her children are the healthiest that have been born into our society in longer than I can

remember. They're large, sturdy, and already very aware of their environment."

"Did you use your Sight?" I ask, holding my breath.

She nods. "When I touched the children, I knew. I knew that they were the answer to our prayers. Either we breed with monsters, or our people die out."

I lean back in my chair. This can't be true. Yet, Galena's Sight has never failed us before.

"There are other female monsters," Elizabeth begins. "Perhaps if they can fall in love with our men, they can be less dangerous. They can become a part of our people the way Medusa has."

"We can't just suddenly tell our people that we're no longer monster-hunters! Their purpose will be gone." Gary stands, glaring at all of us.

I fold my hands in front of my mouth, thinking. Do I trust Medusa? No. Do I want monsters to suddenly join our society? No.

But I'd be a fool to say so. I've seen a change in the others, month after month. They like Medusa. I feared what they would do if we tried to kill her.

And yet, I also can't take away our purpose.

Nor let our people die out.

"What if we didn't come out and tell them that we've changed our stance on monsters?" I say. "What if we send our potential brotherhoods to capture female monsters? What if we give them tasks that will allow them time to get to know the females? By the time they return, they will either be able to tell us the women are dangerous, and we can't reproduce with them, or they'll form a bond. And we can reluctantly agree to allow them here, on certain terms."

Galena relaxes in front of me. "As long as all the women are safe, including Medusa. We will not lure breeders here, simply to kill them when they aren't of use anymore." There's a bite to her words that reveals just how angry she's been with me for even considering still killing Medusa.

"Agreed," I say. "We'll keep our location hidden, so if they cannot do as we wish, we can turn them free once more, without fear of them extracting revenge."

Everyone seems in agreement that my idea is the way to go.

Except Gary and I. We know the truth. We know there are gargoyles among us who may begrudgingly allow Medusa to remain here, but who will also never see monsters as one of us. If any of the women don't work for what we need, we'll set them loose— and we'll send our men to kill them.

The others don't need to know the truth.

“Go,” I tell Galena. “Care for our daughters. They are, after all, the fate of our people.”

Elizabeth nods. “And we should tell the others. And celebrate!”

They leave in a rush of happiness, but Gary and I remain.

When the doors close, he doesn't look at me as he speaks. “We won't let any monster leave here alive, right?”

I smile. “Not a single one.”



Chapter Twenty- Seven



Harold I haven't slept in three months, and I've never been happier in my life. Our daughters, Bella and Trinity, are absolute miracles. We cannot get enough of them. We cannot get enough of their smiles, or their chubby cheeks. We change diapers. We sing songs, and we cherish our beautiful wife—who gave us a family.

Who filled our house with love.

I rush across the grass, heading for a bush on the other side of our village. It has Sweet Berries—fruit my wife says taste like cupcakes. She's asked for a big bowl of them, and I live to serve her every need.

She's amazing. She nurses the babies on demand, bathes them, soothes their tears. If she asked for the moon, I'd give that to her too.

I'd give her anything. She deserves *everything*.

Max, Arthur, Steven, and Clark leave the main hall, looking excited. I pause when they reach me.

"Something happening?"

Arthur grins. "We're going monster-hunting!"

For some reason, my stomach tightens, knowing now that not all monsters are bad changes how I see the world.

"Who?" I ask.

Max leans in, as if sharing a secret. "Keto. She's a mermaid, the mother of all sea monsters. She's supposed to be very dangerous."

"Well," I search for the words. "Good luck."

Steven laughs and puffs out his hard chest. "Believe me, we won't need it."

I go to get the berries, but look back at them as they soar to their home near the edge of our sanctuary, beside the biggest lake. I hope they come back safely.

But it must be my beautiful woman and my amazing daughters, because I also hope they fail in their mission.



Chapter Twenty-Eight

M^{edusa}

I can't believe both babies are asleep. *Seriously*. I love the little angels, but this mama could use a break. I swear they've got their father's energy... which is just exhausting.

Galena slips quietly into the room. I give her a smile I know is tired-looking.

She creeps over to their cribs, looks down, and smiles. That's one thing. Even though I'm getting a little stir-crazy, staying in one place for this long, it's kind of amazing. Everyone treats me, and my daughters, like we're miracles.

My guys say it's because of how rare daughters are, and because they're basically one of our few shots of making sure gargoyles don't become extinct. But either way, it's nice to know my girls will be completely beloved and protected by an entire race.

Galena sighs softly and comes to where I'm sitting in a rocking chair. "Go on then, go take a break. I got it."

I tense, excited at the thought of freedom, but also nervous about leaving them. "You sure?"

She smiles. "I can handle two sleeping babies."

I nod and force myself to stand and grab my stuff, then stuff it in a bag and fling it over my shoulder. I give one lingering look at them, then slip out the door. My guys have built a ladder onto the treehouse for me, so I don't have to wait for one of them to fly me down. Even if they don't like me using it.

Starting down the rungs, I have one second to gasp, before someone plucks me off. I turn and spot Forrest, who's grinning like a madman.

I shake my head. "Quit doing that!"

He laughs. "Who's watching the kids?"

I hesitate. "Galena."

I feel him stiffen. "Surely one of us can—"

“She’s trying to give us a break,” I emphasize, hoping he can read between the lines. “Didn’t you guys go to *bathe*?”

He shifts me in his arms, and I can see his frown. “Are you sure she can handle them?”

I almost roll my eyes. “At least long enough for us all to *relax* together.”

He nods, his expression far away. “I guess.”

We fly to the most private waterfall, and I feel a rush of excitement when I spot my guys already bathing in the waters. They look up at us as we land, and my pulse picks up. Man, it’s been awhile since I saw so much of their skin. So much muscular arms and muscular chests...

“Who’s with the babies?” Byron immediately barks.

“Galena,” I tell him calmly.

He immediately heads for the shore. “I can go—“

I sigh and place my hands on my hips. “You’ll stay right there. The babies will be fine without us for a few minutes.”

My guys exchange a look. Byron sinks back into the water, but he looks irritated.

Okay, it looks like they aren’t going to figure this out without some help.

I reach for the bottom of my shirt. “She’s going to give us some time to get cleaned up on our own.” I pull my shirt off. “To get a break from the babies.” I reach for my comfy pants and pull them off too. Even though I can feel all eyes on me, I pretend not to notice as I strip off my underwear and bra. “And enjoy some time. Alone.”

Splashing into the water, I sigh as the warm water rushes over me. This is what I’ve been waiting for. Well, this, and some dick. A lot of dick.

It’s been two months since I gave birth, and I’ve been given the green light for some action. And I’m so glad... I was about to lose my freakin’ mind. But if my guys think I’m going to beg for it, they have another thing coming.

I grab some of the flowers that bloom near the water and crush them in my hands. Immediately, I’m overwhelmed by the sweet smell. Like chocolate.

This place... it’s fucking amazing.

I rub the flowers together until they foam in my hand, and then I run it through my hair and sweep it over my flesh. Trying to be casual, I glance

at my guys out of the corner of my eyes. Sure enough, they're all watching me.

Moving onto my breasts, I lather the soap over the mounds, and linger over my nipples, before I sink down into the water and wash it off. When I emerge, someone is directly behind me. I spin to find Byron staring down at me.

"Need any help?"

"Help with what?" I ask, innocently.

He raises a brow. "Getting washed up."

I shrug. "No, I'm good."

Reaching behind him, I grab more flowers, crush them up, and continue cleaning myself. My stomach... and lower.

His gaze follows my progress.

When I sink under the water, I'm suddenly face-to-face with his aroused dick. Unable to help myself, I take him in my mouth and start to suck. His cock swells in my mouth, and I suck him slowly before finally coming up for air.

He's panting as I emerge. His eyes darkened by desire. "That was... unexpected."

I reach out and curl my hand around him. "Well, when a giant dick gets that close to my face, I have to do something about it."

Forrest moves closer. "If you're looking for a giant dick..."

I grin and look down. Sure enough, he's hard and absolutely delicious looking.

I reach out and start to stroke him, too. Forrest sighs loudly, and closes his eyes, his hips moving slightly with each stroke of my hands.

Someone grabs me from behind. I gasp and turn to see Marcus. He gives me a pointed look. "Did the healer say that we can...?"

"Yup," I say.

I feel him shudder behind me. "She's sure you'll be safe?"

"Yup." I gently rub my ass against his erection.

He reaches around and grasps my breasts, holding them in his hands. I lean back against him and continue stroking my gargoyles.

When Harold comes to stand at my other side, he tilts my head toward him, and his lips seize mine. His touch is harsh and demanding, his tongue sweeping inside as if to claim me. Marcus' fingers pinch my nipples, and I moan against Harold's lips.

I haven't stopped stroking my men when Byron reaches forward and parts my lower lips. My legs shake as he strokes me gently, slipping into my folds, and dancing along my clit. My nerves scream with each touch of his fingers.

Oh yes, I knew this would be good, but I forgot just how good. How in the hell did I go so long without sex?

Harold breaks our kiss. And Byron lifts my legs and wraps them around his waist.

From behind me, I feel Marcus spreading my ass cheeks. Byron captures my mouth again as Marcus slowly pushes deep inside of me.

My nails dig into Byron's shoulders, and I pant into his mouth, the hard peaks of my nipples brushing against his skin.

When Marcus reaches his hilt, he grasps my thighs and pulls me back from my other men. He lies down on the shore, his dick fully buried into my ass. Byron quickly lies on top of me, and presses his tip into my pussy.

I'm breathing hard, feeling overwhelmed. My nerves are singing, my pleasure building. Having them both inside of me again feels like nothing else. As Byron sinks deeper, the feelings intensify.

Harold tilts my head back, pulling me from Byron's kiss. He and Forrest stand to the sides of my head. Within seconds, Harold angles his cock down and pushes himself into my mouth. His movements are possessive and intense as he dips in over and over again, each time going deeper.

I'm shocked when Forrest tilts me slightly, and then my lips widen as he slips himself into my mouth too. The fit is so fucking tight. But I'm aroused out of my mind, feeling two dicks pressed together, fighting for dominance in my mouth.

They each grab one of my breasts tightly, and they press in deeper, hard and faster.

Marcus and Byron start to fuck me. Not gentle, not making love, but fucking me hard and fast. I'm completely at their mercy, not even able to do more than shift to take them deeper. I'm just sandwiched between them, the luckiest fucking woman in the world. Four big cocks inside of me, four men deliciously capable of pushing me to the edge.

My orgasm builds higher and higher. It grows so intense I'm almost nervous to let it go, to give in. But I don't have a choice. Pleasure sings

through me. Two giant dicks pump in and out of my mouth. Two giant dicks pound into my pussy and ass.

My men start to swear. I feel them swelling.

Feeling my men so close to their own orgasms sends me over the edge, and I come in an overwhelming explosion of sensations, keening wildly around the shafts in my mouth. My orgasm triggers my men and the grip me tightly as they fill every part of me with their delicious cum.

My men come too, gripping me tightly, filling every area of my body with their delicious cum. None stop pumping, not until I've sucked the dicks in my mouth clean, not until Byron and Marcus have spent every drop of their seed.

Exhausted, we collapse and lay together on the shore, our bodies partially in the water. Two dicks still inside of me.

"That was... nice," I say.

"Nice?" Byron raises a brow. "That was fucking epic."

I shrug, trying not to grin. "It was pretty good."

Forrest lies back, his hands behind his head, looking pleased as hell. "I guess she might need another round to decide."

"That could work," I say, laughing.

In this moment, I'm ridiculously happy. I have two babies. I have four amazing men. Basically, I have a better life than I ever thought possible.

"Shit!" Someone exclaims.

I look up to see Benjamin, the head of the guards staring at us with shocked eyes.

"Fucking look away!" Byron shouts.

Benjamin's gaze jerks to the trees. "Uh, Galena said the babies woke up."

I sigh. I guess we'll have to wait a little while for round two.

Benjamin slinks back into the trees, and I watch as my big, naked gargoyles climb out of the water. *Oh my, those are very nice asses.*

Marcus catches my gaze and grins. "See something you like?"

I laugh and shake my head. I can't believe I once thought being a monster meant I couldn't be happy. My happiness fades, and I think about the other female monsters. Those ladies are like my sisters. I wish I could find a way to bring them this kind of happiness too.

Stepping out of the water, I dress. When the babies are old enough, maybe we can travel a little. We could visit everyone and give them a little

hope.

Harold sweeps me into his arms, and I shriek. “Come on, we’ve got babies waiting!”

My thoughts return to my beautiful children as we launch into the air. I don’t know if they’ll be fully gargoyles, when they get old enough to shift, or if they’ll be something else, but I know they’ll have my love and the love of their four protective fathers.

And what more could two little girls need?

Did you enjoy Medusa’s Destiny? Then, preorder your copy of [Keto’s Tale](#)! The next book in my Monsters and Gargoyles’ series is just as hot and full of fun!



A Note From The Author



If you enjoyed this book, please consider leaving a review on Amazon. Your reviews help other readers find my work. They're also a great way for me to learn what my readers want to read more or less of. I have so many ideas for stories, that if one series isn't gaining a lot of interest, I'll move on to another one!

Thank you for reading this story from my heart,

~Lacey Carter Andersen



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About the Author

Lacey Carter Andersen loves reading, writing, and drinking excessive amounts of coffee. She spends her days taking care of her husband, three kids, and three cats. But at night, everything changes! Her imagination runs wild with strong-willed characters, unique worlds, and exciting plots that she enthusiastically puts into stories.

Lacey has dozens of tales: science fiction romances, paranormal romances, short romances, reverse harem romances, and more. So, please feel free to dive into any of her worlds; she loves to have the company!

And you're welcome to reach out to her; she really enjoys hearing from her readers.

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